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FOR ENGLISH LITERATURE





# **ABSALOM A CHRONICLE PLAY**

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**ABSALOM A CHRONICLE PLAY IN THREE ACTS**  
**BY T. STURGE MOORE**

**London**  
**At the Sign of the Unicorn**  
**In Cecil Court St. Martin's Lane**  
**MDCCCIII**



23701.2.31



*Taylor fund*

TO W. A. P.

## DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

☛

DAVID, king of Israel.

☛

ABSALOM, son of David by Maācah.

SOLOMON, son of David by Bathsheba.

☛

AHITOPHEL, chief of David's council, afterwards of Absalom's.

JONADAB, nephew to David and of his council.

JOAB and ABISHAI, brothers, mighty warriors of David's council.

BENAIHAH and ITTAI, captains.

ZADOK and ABIATHA, the priests.

SERAIAH, the scribe.

HUSHAI, a friend of David's and second in Absalom's council.

LEMUEL, a shepherd, armour-bearer to Absalom.

AHIMAAZ, son of Zadok.

JONATHAN, son of Abiatha.

CUSHI, armour-bearer to Joab.

ZIBA, steward to Meribaal, grandson of Saul.

SHIMEI, a descendant of the house of Saul.

ELKANAH, husband of Mikal.

☛

TAMAR, daughter of David by Maācah.

REBECCA, wife to Lemuel.

MIKAL and LEAH, honest women.

RUTH, MERAB, and others, concubines to David.

☛

SONS of David, ELDERS of the people, WATCHMEN, SOLDIERS,  
PEOPLE, PORTERS, SERVANTS.

☛

SCENE, Jerusalem, Mahanaim, The Ford of Kidron, and woodland places.

ABSALOM. ACT I. SCENE I.

§ ABSALOM is discovered in a wood, pulling down saplings by their boughs until the stems crack and they fall towards him. It is noon. A cloak lies on the ground. With arms and knees bare he is dressed in a loose silken vest and boots of leopard skin, straps for hunting knives, horn, pouch, &c., are slung across his shoulders, chains jangle round his neck, and when he straightens up, letting his arms fall, bracelets clatter to his wrists. Pausing to mop his brow he speaks. §

ABSALOM

Did Samson sweat so to lug Dagon down?  
Or cracked the pillars with more loud report  
That bore his house up—stones that yielding closed  
On sweeter anguish than Dalilah ever  
Shared in his arms? Doth not this rush of leaves  
Sound much as roof and hangings floundering down  
Upon those feasting proud Philistian lords?

§ (Holding out his hair.)

My locks are long as Samson's—woven would make  
A splendid web to woo a woman with.

§ (He grapples another tree and forcing it down cries.)

Down, Adonijah, son of Haggith, down!

O beautiful Adonijah, bow, for I

Am fairer yet than thou!

§ (Turning to the largest of the trees he has broken.)

And thou, I see,

The first that bowed, art still the greatest. Thou

Art Ammon, eldest of my brothers, first

To bow. And what more likely? Woman-mad

And dissipated in an hundred beds,

Thou dost displease great David.

§ (Turning to the trees one by one.)

See too,

Shammuah, Shobab, Nathan, Solomon—

Slim wise-boy Solomon, and Chileab

The son of Abigail, and Eglah's son

And little trotting Ibhar and the babe,  
 This flower frail-stemmed.—Elishama, bow thee too.  
 ♫ (Speaking he bends down the head of a tall flower and sets his  
 foot on it. During the above AHITOPHEL has entered but keeps  
 close among the trees.)  
 ♫ (ABSALOM continues, seating himself on that stem which he has  
 addressed as AMMON.)  
 Like sheaves in Joseph's dream they all bow down.  
 Yet this is not a dream: 't will come more true.  
 Seer Nathan said, God humbled man in wrath,  
 Bade him to force subsistence from the earth  
 And struggle for supremacy once his,  
 And I believe him: nothing less than scorn  
 Had equalled me with leopards—hardly me  
 With lions—beggars groundedly may hope;  
 Yea, beasts, birds, trees and weeds push for the best.  
 Must I compete with all who breathe in air?  
 Tread daisies out of life? Put flies in mourning?  
 Rob bees of labour? See sweet roses fade  
 To humour me? Cause women to shed tears  
 To bear me children? Why, of course I must!  
 All do; for it is life to reign thus strictly.  
 And shall I fear to be a man? Old fool  
 This Nathan with his god-loved paupers was.  
 I will be proud; for beautiful I am.—  
 Come, brothers, all is mine or nothing. Give  
 Or I refuse, and go and lie me down  
 Among the dogs and muck-heaps till I die.  
 ♫ (Seeing AHITOPHEL.)  
 Yes, I am beautiful, and thou art not;  
 This tree left standing lives, and these do not;  
 My father slew the giant, thine did not;  
 The hills are lifted up, the coasts are not;  
 David has many sons; would he had not:  
 To meet, see, hear and envy brothers, I  
 Have feet, eyes, ears and heart; would I had not,

Ahitophel.  
**AHITOPHEL**

Hush, beautiful Absalom ;  
Thou wastest kingly power. Thou hast despoiled  
A many trees of promise ; why ? Wouldst thou  
Feed pride and pamper vanity with leaves,  
Which die as they have lived and know it not ?  
Who of his toil lacks profit is a fool ;  
Labour that doth effect no betterment  
Is crowned with laughter. Pardon that I laugh.

§ (Laughing.)

Sooth God himself must laugh too, at such times ;  
Though he grow angry ere his laugh be out.

**ABSALOM**

Yet there is none of all my father's sons  
But makes men laugh at folly : this one, drunk,  
With dim self-exculpations woos his slave ;  
This, sick with love, walks stealthy like a thief ;  
Another, vain, puts on his father's clothes ;  
And one hunts through the forest, growing wild,  
Striving for honour not with men, but beasts.  
Oh, I am fair ; there is no fault in me !  
And when I wake each morning, I stand up  
And say—'Go build a tower on yon hill'—  
'My lord, the land is Joab's,' smiles my slave ;  
I see a woman—'tis some other's wife ;  
A house—my brother's. Then I bite my lips  
And long to break the law so many do,  
(Our father pardons most things in his sons)  
But thus I fear to lose the chiefest good,  
The crown that, as age bows him, slips and slips  
From off his drowsy head . . . .

§ (Leaping up.)

For whom ? A king !

Ah, there's not one is beautiful like me,  
Or has so fair a record in his eyes ;

Nathless I am not safe ; he loves the late  
Out of proportion with the earlier born,  
And Solomon is very near his heart ;  
His mother still beloved, while mine is dead ;  
Besides the boy is wise, though plain enough.—  
Nor is there one of all the forty odd  
But some chance whim might crown in my despite.

**AHITOPHEL**

Be prudent, bide thy time ; thy brothers all  
Lack not the gift that brings them to the ground.  
Virtue is such a gift where is no vice ;  
'Twill trip a young man neatly. Solomon,  
May be, will grow too wise. Win people's love !  
Thy father's voice drops faint ; when nations shout  
They never fail of being heard ; what's said  
By one old dying man, may well be lost  
If all a people shout at the right time.

**ABSALOM**

Thy wisdom is as certain as God's word :  
All men are led by thee ; thou art the king's  
Fixed star ; and I by thee will shape my course,  
Pilot me till my father's crown be mine.  
Ahitophel, the whole world says of thee  
' His words stand fast as oracles of God.'

**AHITOPHEL**

Well, bide thy time and get thee many friends !  
Look round ! If some one can be helped, help him !  
There's this one has been wronged ; him use well !  
Admit the justness of all men's complaints !  
Pretend it angers thee to see wrong done.  
It doth ? Well, let it visibly ! Be loud  
Against the wrong, but name no names ! To-day's  
Not thine, nor yet to-morrow ; thine will come.

**ABSALOM**

I seize a promise ; thou dost point a path !  
Who hath touched power so near as when I have

Stood, beautiful upon a hill at dawn,  
And felt a crown descending from above,  
While light mapped out mine empire? Yet, how soon  
I felt the sun despise me from the sky,  
And feared mere accidents' ascendancy.  
Thus alternates condition everywhere;  
Having been splendid once the year grows down;  
God only is secure!

AHITOPHEL

And those who, wise,  
Wait and walk where he lets them; win his love,  
Never opposed to what he brings about,  
Ruled by what he has done and likeliest means.

ABSALOM

Oh! come away: these trees bemock my hopes;  
They bowed not to me by the will of God.

§(Exeunt.)

## ACT I. SCENE II.

§At Jerusalem before the house of ABSALOM, which has but one storey and no windows; but the blank wall extends in such a way as to show that a spacious court is enclosed from which there rises a huge fig-tree: leaning forwards it screens the nearest portion of the flat roof. Carpets hang over the parapet: a trellis covered with fruit-laden vines forms a porch, under which squats the DOOR-KEEPER on a mat, and to either side are stone benches also in shadow. Time, evening. TAMAR enters from the left in a long striped simar, such as were only worn by virgin daughters of the King; it is rent and soiled: ashes and dust cling to her disordered hair; sobbing, she beats her face; when at the door, she addresses the keeper. §

TAMAR

Is Absalom, my brother, now within?

DOOR-KEEPER

Princess, he hunts to-day as every day.

§(She sits down on the stone bench to the right, and continues



to strike her face, weeping bitterly. The DOOR-KEEPER rises and goes within the house; whence, immediately, in a crowd, the servants flock forth.)

AN OLD WOMAN

Jehovah, what is this?

AN OLD MAN

Come not between

Her prayers and God. 'Vengeance is mine,' said God.

A MAN (In a whisper.)

Of some man hath a Princess suffered shame?

ANOTHER

If it be so, will David e'er abide it?

OLD MAN

Hush, hush, she prays: pray we she be avenged.

(Many of the women rend their clothes and throw dust on their hair, uttering cries in imitation of TAMAR.)

OLD MAN

My lord doth love his sister very dearly;

He surely will avenge her. Pray for it.

(A silence.)

DOOR-KEEPER (Addressing TAMAR.)

Behold, my lord descendeth yonder hill;

Up from the east he comes, alone he comes;

There is no quarry borne behind my lord.

TAMAR

Go every man in quietly, let none

Prepare to welcome home his lord; keep close!

While I myself will stand behind this vine;

There, reach ye me a cup wherein to press

A bunch of grapes, that he may quench his thirst.

ABSALOM (Enters on the right.)

I am no King indeed; no slaves, see, stand

To bow me through the portals of my house.

Ahitophel, patience and policy,

Must King me.

TAMAR (Stretching her hand forth from the vine.)

Drink, my lord.

§ (ABSALOM starts.)

TAMAR

My lord is thirsty?

§ (ABSALOM takes the cup and drinks, pausing.)

Thou sayest true § (He drinks again, pausing.)

A woman's? Tamar's voice?

§ (He drains the cup.)

Nay a dry voice, a stranger voice; whose then?

TAMAR

The draught was good?

ABSALOM

The draught could not be sweeter nor the hand,

That proffered it, more lovely. But the face,

That owns the hand, should . . .

TAMAR § (Breaking forth.)

'Sweet' a child's drink!

A man drinks wine—old wine is yet too thin!

My brother must drink blood!

ABSALOM

Jehovah! who,

Who hath wronged thee? Or . . . Is my father dead?

Nay, thou art shamed! This is some brother's deed!

Oh, say it was a brother!

TAMAR

Ammon.

ABSALOM

Ammon!

I love thee, Ammon. Thou dost break thy neck.

'Ammon the first to bow'—indeed 'tis true!

I will go straight and sheathe my sword in him.

TAMAR

Brother, his house is barred; his servants—all

Are armed.

ABSALOM

No matter! Samson would not wait.

Yet . . . Policy, patience, Ahitophel!

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But no; blood's needed! called for! I must drink;  
'Twas thou saidst so; Tamar, look at me!  
Dost spy some weakness? Search! Fear I his slaves?  
This policy is so like cowardice.  
This patience seems so cold, so unlike love.  
Thou, most of all, the cherished of my heart,  
Come to me, Tamar, come and prove my love.  
Art thou then soiled? I press thy shame to me;

§ (Tears a strip from her skirt.)

I'll wear thy shame wrapped in my turban's folds;  
I'll kiss thy shame each morning, and each night  
Will dream of nothing but thy shame's redress,  
Sure stratagems to bring thee Ammon's head,  
And prove no coward, daring love thy shame.  
Come thou within; my house is thy shame's home.

§ (They go within, and after a little reappear on the roof.)

ABSALOM § (Holding up a cup.)

Yesterday I had drained this to thy health,  
Sweet Tamar, now it hurts to think of thee:—  
To any shepherd's daughter this sad chance,  
Foreknown as possible calamity,  
Might have brought tears and pain yet not despair.  
That it had been before, might be again,  
Had then proved comfort. Daughter of a king,  
Illimitable and unique thy woe.  
But worse, far worse!

The aggressor was thy brother! that alone  
Had been enough to blast the humblest lot:  
O sister, there is nothing left for thee:  
No grain will now be poured upon thy head,  
And on thy bridegroom's head, as both are bent  
To hide the mutual happy blush. Thy child  
Will not be welcomed there where others play;  
He will keep near thee, and his woe become  
A future far more dreadful to thy thoughts  
Than thine own hidden past unspeakable.

VIII

Then not to thee, Revenge of thee, I drink ;  
Let that live, waxing always to bear fruit,  
Upon red wine—wine red and rich as blood.

§ (He raises the cup. DAVID enters below, seeing whom he breaks off.)

Hush, who comes here ?

§ (Then draws TAMAR behind the branches of the fig.)

DAVID

Solomon !

SOLOMON § (Running in.)

Father !

There are armed men stand all round Ammon's house !

DAVID

Oh, Ammon brings much trouble on mine age !  
Ammon hath bowed knee to the Queen of Heaven,  
A Tyrian goddess, boy ; she poisons blood,  
Till every woman seen maddens to lust :  
Jehovah is a jealous god ; and ill  
To brook his anger. Wealth and length of days  
He will not grant to unrepentant Ammon  
Unless he mend his life. Love thou our God.

SOLOMON

Father, it was king Hiram's builders planted out  
The Queen of Heaven's grove, what time they raised  
Thy royal cedar house.

DAVID

O boy, Great God

Is vexed with me ; mind me not of my grief !  
He will not have me build his holy house :  
Yet saith my seed shall build it later on.  
It may be thou shalt build for God an house :  
If thou dost love him he will honour thee.  
But ah, the Lord, since, cursed my seed, as well !  
Because of thy fair mother and my sin  
'The sword shall never quit my luckless house.'

§ (ABSALOM dips his fingers in the cup and sprinkles the ground

IX

before DAVID, then withdraws again.)  
SOLOMON

Look! father, look! these drops that fell from heaven  
And yet the sky is clear. See, they are red.

DAVID

Nay, I heard nothing fall: these drops are old,  
Dripped from some sacrifice of Absalom's  
As he did bring it back to feast his friends.

SOLOMON

But, father, they are wet!

DAVID

Why, wilt thou be  
So wise? Thou wilt not let my peace alone.  
Oh, say, the sign's from heaven! call it blood!  
Our God is far too strong to wrestle with!  
Though he doth mean me ill, my seed shall reign;  
My house shall stand; for he hath vowed it, child.  
Let prophecy alone: 'tis an ill trade!

SOLOMON

Father. I did not seek to anger thee.

§ (ABSALOM sprinkles the ground a second time.)

DAVID § (Starting.)

Come, let's away and learn why Ammon arms;  
Go, call my guard to me at Ammon's house!

§ (Exeunt severally.)

ABSALOM § (Standing out on the roof.)

Vengeance, use mine, not age's trembling hand!

§ (He drains the cup.)

Thus may I drink my brother Ammon's blood!

§ (The CURTAIN drops.)

### ACT I. SCENE III.

§ King David's palace in Millo. The council-chamber surrounded  
by divans; the back is shut off from the central court of the  
Palace by reed screens and trellises of wood; leaving, however,  
several issues on to a flight of steps of one width with the room,

x

which descends into the court ; to the left is a casement giving over some roofs, at first closed but open later on. DAVID is seated on a cedar throne to the right ; JONADAB, ABISHAI, JOAB, BENAIAH, and ZADOK and ABIATHAR the priests, on cushions which enclose a square in front of him, in the centre of which, raised on an ornate stool and pillow, are the tablets of the Chronicles corded with silken cords ; SERAIAH the Scribe sits on a stool at DAVID'S feet. All are dressed in sumptuous robes, with much jewellery and many handsome arms. Clogs and slippers are ranged in pairs beside large bowls of water which stand near the doorways. Outside the sun is brilliant, making the interior rich and dim.

**AHITOPHELS.** (Risen from the cushion opposite the throne, commences to speak as the curtain lifts.)

O king, fair snow lies quiet on high hills,  
And summer through sleeps safe on lofty mounts,  
So would white hairs, on brows of great kings, sleep ;  
But sleep they in like safety ? O my lord,  
Be patient if I blame thee for fond peace.  
Art thou so wise as in thy warlike prime ?  
Or didst thou slip deep counsel from thy brow,  
What time thou putst aside thine iron suits,  
In mind and body wearied both at once ?  
Thy palace deemed secure as cave sepulchral,  
Art thou as little as the dead aware,  
That still Jehovah doth exact his due,  
And soon from this large respite, setting forth,  
Will hurtle through the land with shocks of war,  
A God in battles dread, a Lord of Hosts ?

**BENAIAH**

My lord the king, give ear to what he saith ;  
Thy Cherethites and Pelethites grow sad :  
E'en at their feast those mighty warriors turn  
And gaze each in the other's mournful eyes.

**DAVID**

Ahitophel, uneasy is thy mind ;

XI.

B

Thy strenuous spirit, grudging every pause,  
Chafes thee against the blessing of the Lord.  
My whole life through Jehovah have I served,  
Nor to Astarte, nor to Baal bowed knee;  
His mind is bent to recompense me now;  
My sons are all together at a feast;  
And I in council here with valiant men,  
Good Jonadab my brother Shimeah's son,  
Abishai, Joab, Zeruiah's sons—  
A right and left arm to me fifty years,  
We were together in Adullam's cave,—  
Then priestly Zadok and Abiathar,  
Seraiah who writes our praises down,  
And wisest of the wise Ahitophel.

**AHITOPHEL**

Thy sons are all together at a feast?  
But to what purpose, O my lord, the king?  
To Baal-Hazor is not far from hence,  
Yet from the peaceful feast of sheep-shearers  
Swift Trouble hither, may be, starts to run—  
With Absalom thou trustest all thy sons!  
Is he their father, loving them like thee?  
Hath he no cause to envy or to hate?

**DAVID**

He is their brother very brotherly;  
The young men are together, full of love.

**AHITOPHEL**

Think, think, rash father, of thy absent sons!  
Hath Ammon paid for love from Absalom?

**DAVID**

It is forgotten, that repented sin,  
Son Absalom has pardoned all, like me.

**AHITOPHEL**

'Forgotten?' Overweening is thy soul!  
Can Tamar be 'forgotten,' sitting there,  
Within the house of Absalom alone?

Day after day he looks on her through tears,  
Brushed quickly by an angry hand away,  
Which vows straight vengeance in Jehovah's name  
Being shaken toward weak Ammon's noisy house.

DAVID

Two years have given place: if this were true,  
Long since it had borne fruit—time out of mind!  
But thine ambition edges thee to stretch  
To looming portent, danger's bare occasion.  
Safe is the prophet of the evil day:  
For men are sure to err, and soon or late  
His word comes true, though for quite other cause,  
When some new sin brings retribution down.

JOAB

Ahitophel, I have not seen these signs,  
Yet oft walk with the young man Absalom,  
Who loves to talk of famous Gideon's deeds:  
They fill his soul with envy worthy him.

DAVID

He bears great piety towards the Lord.

ZADOK

His sacrifices nobly warrant it.

JOAB

A father's life he takes for lamp and guide,  
Begging recitals o'er and o'er again:  
When, as I pass from lofty deed to deed,  
He lifts his head and seems to mount a stair,  
Until, with royal grace, he thanks my pains  
And minds me, so, of dark Engedi's cave  
Where I saw his great father stand just thus—  
Flourish o'er head a skirt of crimson cloth  
And cry across to Saul, whose mantle, clipped,  
Fluttered like a child's shirt about his knees;  
Whose generous child-like nature straight gushed back;  
Health came again; the mad-man was the king,  
Loving that nobleness he sought to slay;

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With kingly David royal kisses changed  
And vowed with tears to hold him in his heart.

**AHITOPHEL**

All this is well ; what sign did Gideon beg ?  
A fleece, a fleece first dry then wringing wet !  
Many a fleece hath Absalom sheared of late :  
Chance, he may like to soak or dye a few  
Crimson 's proud colour ; blood is royal dye.  
See him, now treading where his father trod,  
Heave up the purple rag above his head !  
In greater safety, with more confidence,  
He waves, and waves a dripping trophy round :  
Soon, sits in Ammon's place, as thou didst sit,  
O David, later, in the seat of Saul ;  
Where, may be he will sleep, as thou dost sleep ;  
When his son, mounting where his father trod,  
Steps one step higher, dips in deeper dye  
And waves a guiltier trophy o'er him dead.

**DAVID**

Ahitophel, art mad ? Turbulent fool,  
I am the man that I have always been,  
And thou shalt know it. Let the Lord arise,  
Let trumpets blow : and forth to war will I  
And deal with all who dare to threaten me !

**JOAB**

Thy bands, thy heroes, ne'er in better case,  
Wait, all impatient, for such summons blown.

**BENAIAH**

O my good Lord, they famish for the fight !—  
Deep-brooding stern Abishai's white head  
Lifts like an eagle's ere the storm-wind wake !

☛ (Pointing to him.)

**DAVID**

O Lips for blood, and Tongues for policy,  
Like to a pack of hounds you flick and smack,  
And shake my goodness as it were a chain !

JOAB

My lord, there's many are not old as we ;  
Thy sons are idle, idle in their youth :  
'Tis well to rest one's age. But blood is blood,  
And war is war, saith Joab ; kings must rule.

DAVID

Thou too art half against me, fierce and old.  
Thy brother, taciturn Abishai,  
Glares, with mute eye, full comment on thy text.

JOAB

My lord, being trained to war, we love our trade ;  
But thou art king, hast nicer work in hand ;  
Pardon our 'prentice-judgments, heed them not.

DAVID

Ah ! Joab, thou wast e'er my friend indeed.

§ (Looking askance at AHITOPHEL, who has walked to the case-  
ment on the left and pretends, peering through, to be engrossed  
on things without.)

Ahitophel doth over-reach himself ;  
I cannot bide with such a council's-chief.  
Know, sirrah § (AHITOPHEL turns and comes forward.)

It is wisdom in old age

To be as gentle as a little child.  
To weep tears, as I weep now, is not weak.  
To shake at power still, with forceful hands,  
Were gluttony : the ground lies strewn with fruit.  
How pleasant is it, under Gotham's oaks,  
Dismounted from our mules, with women fair  
And children noisy like the smaller birds  
Sweeping in bebies near or farther off,  
To tune one's harp, and bowered mid tall fern  
Pic-nic secure as girt by garden walls !—  
Win smiles, and gratitude, and intimacy !  
With trustfulness and frankness these are won,  
Not with edged policy and dark deceit.  
Oh, it is vicious not to know a change !

xv

To keep one mind for-ever is not wise !  
Life circles through a zodiac of moods,  
All comely, and indulgence knows her time ;  
Leniency drapes the dignity of age.—  
Sing now, my soul, for many benefits ;  
The Lord has blessed thee with an open hand.—  
Go, fetch my harp : I made a psalm to-day,  
Which I will sing, how weak so-e'er my voice !

§ (ABIATHAR goes for the harp.)

ZADOK

Aye, sing, my lord, in great Jehovah's praise,  
And put away the fear of evil men !

§ (ABIATHAR returns with the harp, which DAVID tunes while AHITOPHEL again retreats to the lattice, which soon he partially opens.)

DAVID

O Lord my God, what benefits are these !  
Behold thou hast set children on my knees !  
Thou raisest crenelated ramparts round,  
That in my house security be found.  
Thou bowest down the heavens now no more ;  
But retest, while thy worshippers adore.  
To deep humility compelled by thee,  
Mine enemies from far buy peace of me.  
Not trumpets, lutes I hear ; the maidens dance,  
The young men join them, throwing by the lance.  
Tall sons as beautiful as stately deer,  
Fair daughters like gazelles secure from fear,  
Are met with in the doorways of my house,  
Whose walls rejoice to hear, when they carouse.  
The sword is sheathed ; in Zion sleep is safe ;  
Shields are hung up . . . .

I can no more, for it remembers me  
The sword, my God hath threatened, shall not pass

XVI

From out my house.

§ (To AHITOPHEL, who turns again from the casement, without, however, leaving it.)

Thou workest on my fears ;  
And, if I lift my face before the Lord,  
Wouldst ever throw me down to kiss the dust,  
Loving to see me humbled ! Enemy  
Art thou, and strivest with the grace of God  
To me-ward bent. For shame, thou upstart, thou,  
Hating thy betters, envious, covetous, lean !  
I'll banish thee my court ; thy carping face  
Makes tasteless all my food. When we are old  
We cling to comfort. Yea ! and have I none ?  
The Lord is my sure comfort ; being served  
As I have served, he will not cast me down.

AHITOPHEL

How wise is age and open to advice !

DAVID

At forty men grow testy with the past. . .

AHITOPHEL

At sixty dote and doze o'er former fame. . .

DAVID § (Continuing.)

They chafe to think what fools they were when young. . .

AHITOPHEL § (Continuing.)

In folly drowning folly grown eye-sore.

DAVID

Be careful how thou raise mine ire yet.

AHITOPHEL § (Throwing the casement wide open.)

Thy will is mine ; would that thy wisdom were,  
O king !

DAVID

Then vex me not with woes unborn.

AHITOPHEL

Would that I lived in thy security !

Could feel as happy in my sons ; as sure,  
That coming years were harvests coming on ;

xvii

That days advanced like olives waxing ripe,  
Or that Great God were fond, as man, of rest !  
O king, it was excess of zeal that spoke :  
And now excess of prudence veils mine eyes,  
Which, else, would see a messenger that comes  
Rather as those that bring ill news than good,  
With wild despairing gesture and shrill cries . . .  
See, he throws dust upon his head, my lord !

DAVID

My God, my God ! Try thou my heart no more !

MESSENGER\$ (Entering and falling on his face.)

Lord Absalom hath slain thy sons, my Lord,  
And none is left. Ammon these eyes saw fall.

\$ (All arise and rend their garments, the king throws himself on his face to the ground, the rest remain standing with bowed heads, while a great hurrying to and fro fills the court, and a noise of wailing women comes from distant apartments.)\$

JONADAB\$ (Approaching the king.)

Not all, my lord the king ; suppose not all !  
Ammon alone is dead ; for Tamar's sake,  
Hath Absalom determined this long since.  
Take it not with such violence to heart,  
For Ammon only Absalom hath slain !

\$ (The young man that keeps the watch enters and draws JONADAB to the casement near where AHITOPHEL stands to look out.)

JONADAB\$ (Turning to the king exclaims from moment to moment.)

Behold ! look forth and see ! the king's sons come :—  
For even as thy servant said it is !—  
Upon their mules all trotting down the hill !—  
Much people with them.—See, the young men live !  
Behold they wind beneath yon olive grove !—  
My lord, they cross the bridge !—They pass the gate !—  
Hark ! they are in the court.

DAVID\$ (Rising.)

My sons ! my sons !—

My Solomon, come fill my loving arms.

xviii

☞(As he descends the stairs towards the courtyard he is seen to embrace SOLOMON, while all the princes and people weep for Ammon.)

AHITOPHEL☞(Who is left alone in the council chamber, moves from the casement.)

Ha, thus the young men ride with jingling bells!  
So up and down the hilly slopes they ride,  
With trembling knees and faces pale, unarmed,—  
A train of captive women doleful, dumb;  
Or chatt'ring like a harem scared at bath!  
I saw them, and the ambling of their mules,  
That never gallop, pictured me their lives  
That amble always up and down the slopes  
In turmoil purposeless; like buzzing flies  
Put all in panic if a shadow pass;  
Their tumult vapid as their pleasures are.  
How should such dancing girls prop David's house,  
Whose age hath sapped him though he own it not?  
Then must we let our poor half-dotard king  
Toss Israel's wealth like corn among this swarm  
Of fluttery pigeons plumped with dainty fare,  
That strut about in pigmy pomp and coo—  
Wheel off on whirring wings, if but a child  
Clap hands to see their gemmy collars gleam.  
Say, is there none of all his sons like him?  
Like in essential mastery, and charm  
That keeps men friendly through his sleeping whiles?  
None who loves stir and the attempt to gain—  
To garner strength and knowledge, proud possession,  
Dominion with extended realm for chance,  
Wherein to chase a more abundant game  
With hopes as he with hounds has loved to chase—  
With application not a mule, a steed,  
With quick decisions for his javelins,  
Expertness in affairs for horsemanship—  
Admired more through practice day by day?

Is not this future apt for Absalom?  
 Though he have faults, deficiencies enough :  
 Too eager and too little based on fear—  
 Not vigilant to miss no least new thing  
 That God hath latest done—lets dreams grow rank,  
 And, truant in the Future, passes by  
 The Present with its quiet proffered aid.  
 He is not David (not what David was,  
 Who sure has run to seed) ; still he is what,  
 I deem, may be relied on to grow great  
 And shelter me and give my genius scope.  
 If I can only keep him well in hand !  
 Could one but trust him, being absent too ;  
 Were women sure to find quick wits for him—  
 Put images to bed, and lie for him,  
 Would men but do their murders for his good,  
 As Joab Abner ; were he wise to dance  
 Before the servants on an holiday,  
 Or weep for those whose death makes straight his path—  
 Though lion-hearted, were he this besides  
 I should not clasp my heart that beats too fast ;  
 I should not ask for signs—not ask for signs !—  
 My God, as thou art great, keep me awake  
 To see what way thou takest. Give me signs  
 And I will serve thee even as David hath.  
 ♪ (The CURTAIN is lowered.)

ACT II. SCENE I.

§ The roof of Absalom's house. Time: morning. ABSALOM is discovered in a pavilion reclining on a couch and playing with a litter of leopard cubs in a basket. Through the parting of the tent-skirts a trap is visible with stairs leading down into the interior; beyond the parapet the open country. §

ABSALOM § (Speaking to himself.)

How this sleek vermin battles with my fist!  
Though silken-pawed, as with their marbled dam,  
They quarrel with most circumstantial growls,  
Till effort warming kindles such good earnest  
As, sooth, will sometimes pass the bounds of play,—  
When I correct, much as their mother would  
Cuffing their heads with velvet paw severe.  
This is their school, their lesson how to fight:  
And what an ardour have they not to learn,  
Teaching each other when none else is by!  
For food and slumber only are relaxed  
These strenuous ordeals,  
By instinct true imposed,—

The pounce from ambush, the escape from grip . . .

§ (Leaving them and standing up.)

In truancy usurp I on their realm,  
Forgetting manners, honour and renown,  
To out-wit lynx, or take the cheetah's part,  
When, bounding light across the summer plain,  
It brings the soft gazelle, all panting, down.  
Else, like a hawk in hood and jesses here  
I mope or grow familiar with these cubs.—  
Sleep, kitties, sleep; for me a kingdom waits:  
I'll hold my head up! thus!  
This hair is grown a load;  
'Tis time it should be cut.  
Yes, yes, a second anniversary,  
Since Ammon lost his head at feast I gave,  
Its black and hush descent will put on record.



What profits me the peril of that deed,  
 Wond'rously planned and cogitated so?  
 Is any increase in pale Tamar's smiles?  
 Notes she this eager March out-Aprils April?  
 She hath no eyes for flowers, till when they fade:  
 Then, they come o'er her. No! all stands the same;  
 This fleece will weigh against the stoutest ram's  
 As heretofore, and folk will marvel . . . I  
 Perhaps get drunk. . . . Ahitophel  
 Most likely keep away; for, since he's fallen  
 Out of my father's grace, he keeps away  
 From one still less within that grace, and so  
 I chafe, and yawn, and nothing comes of it.  
 Joab has proved my friend; in act indeed  
 My friend; but not in smiles—in greetings—in  
 A civil answer to my messages,  
 He's not my friend. Twice has refused to come;  
 Though I sent twice, and so am idle still.  
 Hope is my drink and fear my nauseous meat;  
 I wash one with the other down and starve,  
 A dog for hunger, thirsty as the dust.  
 ♣ (An old and ragged man comes up by the trap, cloaked.)  
 Art thou an-hungered; hast thou come to beg  
 Of one more famished far, thou grey-beard fool?

OLD MAN

Jehovah sends me with his word for thee.

ABSALOM ♣ (Folding his arms.)

Despatch his business smartly and begone.

OLD MAN

Hark, haughty prince, thus the Eternal saith:

'I send a worm upon that lazy vine

Which bears no fruit but smothers up in leaves

Rank overgrowth flaccid with sap—a worm

Shall blast green pride. Upon the lion's cub,

That croppeth grass and batteneth on green corn,

An army of lean dogs I send, to bark,

XXII

Persist, disturb and rouse his corpulent shame,  
Till servants, women, children, everywhere,  
Shall laugh to see the lion teased about  
By yelping curs; the little quick-eyed boys  
Will catch the burden up and bark and bark;  
The girls shall bark if they for laughter can;  
E'en babes shall turn them from the breast and bark;  
The nation grow to seem a single mouth  
To bark, and bark, and bark, as I bark now.'

§ (Barking.)

ABSALOM

But, by Jehovah, ere the tune shall start,  
That lion's whelp shall seize that foremost cur,

§ (Bounding upon the old man.)

And bear him down, and force him on his knees  
When, even as Samson with the lion, he  
Shall prize his jaws so wide, that rain and sun,  
Dust, wind and busy ants and flies shall come  
Briskly, and enter through that gaping gate;  
Then bear the whole contents of his thick hide  
Forth to their foreign cities and far homes.  
At last when all is clean, where all was foul;  
Industrious bees shall bear sweet burdens there—  
Build up a luscious comb, the which, returned,  
And passing once again by that same place,  
The lion's whelp shall mightily enjoy.  
Barking may be, for very sport, to think,  
How that cur barked upon that sunny day,  
Ahitophel.

§ (While speaking ABSALOM has forced AHITOPHEL to the ground, torn off his hood and white goat-skin beard; now as he ends both laugh heartily.)

ABSALOM

Hadst thou, deceiver, been true prophet, I  
Had torn thee downward from the jaws in twain.

AHITOPHEL

Yea, my young lord has arms quite strong enough.

XXIII

ABSALOM

My heart is strong enough: my blood's so hot,  
It dances on my temples, bounds and throbs,  
Till I am stunned and deadened into dreams,  
Wherein I grapple giants round the waist,  
Or stride down into Egypt with a sword,  
And kill, till I am weary, Samson's way,  
Then rest me on the heaps that I have slain.

AHITOPHEL

And yet, thou durst not push thy father's door  
To claim his pardon for a brother slain  
With good excuse and in a natural cause.

ABSALOM

At least I am recalled from banishment;  
Though truly God takes time in making kings.

AHITOPHEL

Whose work was that?

ABSALOM

Joab's: he sent to plead  
Before the king a woman; whose last son  
Had slain his brother (so she had been taught).  
Her relatives were all in arms, of course,  
To wreak sweet vengeance on her now sole hope:  
Since she was widowed. Well the king, much moved,  
Promised her all; whereon she, opening issue,  
Touched him right home.—'This, this is Joab's work'  
Cries he;—'Even as an angel of the Lord art thou  
To see what is quite plain, O king,' she smiles:  
Straight I was sent for. There, the matter dropped;  
Joab to visit me will not consent. . . .

AHITOPHEL

Canst thou not force him?

ABSALOM

Yonder, see, his field,  
That caps yon ridge and keeps me stivey here,  
Strange irritation blows from thence, a hot

XXIV

Uncomfortable sense of some one else.  
Set fire to yonder barley, I do think,  
He'll come to learn the reason.

AHITOPHEL

Wherefore wait?

ABSALOM

I will catch foxes, turn them tail to tail  
And bind a brand between; then watch them, mad,  
Disastrous, straggle all about his corn.  
'Twill be both sport and business!

AHITOPHEL

Aye, but why

Catch foxes?

ABSALOM

O Ahitophel, thou hast no love  
Of what I'm drunk withal, the sound of things!  
There, I'll send servants straight: it shall be done.

AHITOPHEL

So I replace my cloak and get me back  
To Giloh gently, having served the Lord.  
May'st thou fare well, my lord, the prince.

☛(Exit.)

ABSALOM

Farewell.

☛(He claps his hands, SERVANTS come up.)  
Dost see, yon barley, that shoots tall and dry?  
Go set me brands along its windward edge,  
That it may burn and quickly burn away.

SERVANT

My lord, the field is Joab's.

ABSALOM

Joab's be the loss.

SERVANT

My lord is merry: we have heard him laugh.

ABSALOM

To hear him laugh again set sharp to work.

xxv

SERVANT

My lord, great Joab, sure, will have us whipped.

ABSALOM

Say; I bade you.

SERVANT

My lord will change his mind.

ABSALOM

Indeed 'my lord' will change his manners too  
And tear you as a lion teareth sheep,  
Roaring, but not with laughter. Get you gone.

§ (He threatens them and they go. A silence.)

ABSALOM § (Drawing back the tent skirts on the right.)

There! there, the smoke begins to skim away;  
Thin, slant and straight the smart breeze combs it up;  
The flame, see, red, brown, purple, almost black,  
Eager to singe more bristling beards, leans out;  
The great blue noon watches with bated breath.  
This hour hugs me! Now I am loved and borne  
Shoulder-high, toward the future, Joshua,  
Moses, Caleb, Joseph, Abraham!  
Anxieties cradle me!

Alas, this is indeed

No national crisis, no momentous poise,  
Whereon the toppling tribes, in jeopardy,  
Demand one hand, nerved steady by a soul  
Void of mean cares.

There Joab's servants come

To put all out; they wrangle with my men;  
Some run to call their master. Let him come.—  
O Joab, how I love thee, fierce old lion!  
Joab, arise, come! Joab, quick, thy barley burns!  
Joab, a-hoy! Ho, Joab; Joab, hither!  
The enemy is upon thee, Joab! Hi!

§ (Shouting he leans out over the parapet which is close against the pavilion on that side.)

XXVI

JOAB\$ (Hurrying up the stairs.)

My lord, my lord, what thing is this thou dost,  
Unto thy very faithful friend?

ABSALOM\$ (Turning round.)

Ha, ha!

Nay, nay, not on thy knees to me. Well done!  
So thou hast come? Mine importunity  
Avails at last? Come kiss me, Joab. There!  
I'll pay thee for thy barley twice its worth.  
For minding thee of David's youth thou lov'st me;  
Is it not so, dear Joab?

Then reflect,  
Think of me banished still my father's face,  
No wars abroad, where prowess might win pardon,  
No way to band four hundred well-armed men  
And out and pillage cities as he used;  
Amalekites keep such respective distance:  
The five Philistian cities pay for peace—  
Peace, that is old men's gain, but young men's loss;  
Peace that I love not, sleepy, stale, fat peace.  
Dost thou not rust, good Joab? Ittai,  
And all the Gibborim, the men of war,  
Are they not stiff and sour and out of tune?  
Jehovah! Now thou sheddest tears for War!  
Lusty, defamed, notorious, jolly War,  
That's out of fashion but will in again!  
O never fear, when I am king then war  
Will flourish trumpets, shake old banners out  
And march him down to Edom, try his strength;  
Then turn upon Damascus, push as far  
As Tyre—be the wonder of the world!

JOAB

My boy, thou art thy father's worthy son,  
And I will tell him so. He'll call thee back:  
Why, we old men, who have been greatly young,  
Love youth beyond the best of things besides!

XXVII

C

Boy, ne'er forget Jehovah. On thy soul  
Forget not him, but serve thy father's God,  
Who loveth battles, who is Lord of Hosts!  
Be righteous to thine enemies! Make war  
On Edom, ay, and Tyre too; but, boy,  
Be just! beware of promises, ne'er promise peace!  
These promises they bind men up like babes;  
The Lord will none of them. Thy father's old,  
But still he's bound, and might be twice the man  
If 'twere not for these courteous promises.  
They make him rich, but not so rich as Tyre.

**ABSALOM**

Oh, never fear, I'll not be bound to Peace.  
Peace is mine enemy, a foolish foe,  
That flies when threatened, prays and hopes too much.  
The Lord God terrible in battles I  
Will love, and worship actively each day.  
Come, Joab, thou must stay and dine with me;—  
Recount brave deeds, what chanced at Hachilah,  
When David and Abishai went down  
By night, and took the spear of sleeping Saul,  
His cruse of water likewise, then came back  
And raised a cry for Abner, who woke up . . . .  
Or how ye posted on, from Ziklag burnt,  
Three days, three nights behind Amalekites,  
And caught them spread abroad on all the earth,  
Feasting and drinking, dancing round your spoil.  
Ye smote them, did ye not, from twilight even  
To twilight, spoiling those that had spoiled you?  
Come in, good Joab, I have greedy ears.

§ (Exeunt.)

**ACT II. SCENE II.**

§ Jerusalem within the gate. Time, morning. Gateway on the left;  
adjoining it on the right the judgment seat, roomy, to hold many  
judges; above, a tower and ramparts against the sky; to the right  
tall houses divided by a narrow lane, which runs back and up toward

XXVIII

the city: enter, descending from thence, fifty fellows in fine liveries whom Absalom has prepared to run before him; reaching the place by the gate they form in a company, stop, and commence to sing, while the passers-by gradually collect in a crowd. §

SONG § (In unison.)

Our prince is as a summer morning fair,  
Sweet ointment shines like dew upon his hair;  
All whom he meets turn back, fain after him to stare:  
Lord Absalom, whose name  
Sets maiden cheeks aflame.

Our prince stands up as, when the day doth break,  
Stands, dew-drenched, tall, an oak-tree sure to make  
The country shepherds blink, it shines so, when they wake;  
Lord Absalom, whose eyes,  
Fill female hearts with sighs.

His hair is thick, and glossy, and as black  
As raven wings, the line along his back  
Curves like a well-shaped bow, whose sounding string is slack:  
Lord Absalom, whose skill  
Makes Envy's blood stand still.

A lion's whelp he is and very strong,  
So swift no road to him seems over long;  
And naught he takes in hand doth ever far go wrong:  
Lord Absalom, whose soul  
To Fear hath ne'er paid toll.

How fair and pleasant Absalom our lord,  
Whose speech is now a lute, and now a sword;  
He leads the good with gifts, the wicked with a cord:  
Lord Absalom, whose ears  
Befriend all whom he hears.

Lord Absalom, whose boundless riches give  
A third of Judah's host the means to live,  
And half your daughters gems to please their suitors with.  
The prince, whom thus we sing,

XXIX



Shall he not be your king?

§ (They cease and break into groups.)

THE FIRST OF TWO WOMEN

Oh, what pretty coats! a handsome sort

That wears them too, comely as men are made!

What say you, Leah?

LEAH

Their eyes are always on you, black as crows

That watch to pilfer.

FIRST WOMAN

They're far too plump for thieves!

§ (To one of the serving men.)

Pray you, fair master, let me feel this cloth,

'Tis a sweet fabric.

LEAH

O Mikal, Mikal, consort you not with them;

They are lewd fellows all, these princes' men.

MIKAL § (To the serving man as before.)

Pray, sir, doth the Lord Absalom in truth

Furnish you all these tassels and gold braid?

SERVING MAN

Ay, every tassel.

MIKAL

Lord! keeps he a booth i' th' fair?

SERVING MAN

So, Mistress, you are full of guile, I see

Your fingers are too bold.

§ (Catching and kissing her.)

Take this, and this.

LEAH

Oh, help her, masters; see the monster mauls

Her nice clean frock; her hair is coming down!

She is an honest woman, though a blithesome soul,

Not to be treated like your harlotry.

§ (Enter the husband of the first woman, he seizes the staff dropped by the serving-man and beats him with it.)

xxx

**SERVING MANS** (Letting the woman go.)

Help, comrades, help!

☛ (All Absalom's runners make a set on the husband and drive him about; the crowd laughs, except the two women, who throw dust on their heads, shrieking. Into the midst of the hubbub the prince's chariot drives.)

**ABSALOM**

I'll have ye hanged on fifty gibbets, fools.

Break peace! ye that were hired to keep it! Shame!

What causes all this tumult and uproar?

**LEAH**☛ (Throwing herself on her face before him.)

Plases my Lord to let his handmaid speak?

**ABSALOM**

Ay, it will please, I pray thee all the truth.

**LEAH**

My Lord, I came here with my gossip, Mikal,

That is an honest wife unto Helkiah,

As all our street knows well. She has her ways,

Accosting men like brothers, but is honest.

She much admired your servants' pretty coats:

Would feel the cloth: when he, whose garb she touched,

Cries loud, 'Thy fingers are too bold,'—(but there!

My Lord, here stood I, nothing farther off

Than thou from me, and as I saw, I speak)

Her fingers had not touched him anywhere,

But barely trespassed on his fine coat's hem,

Yet straight he clips her round, claps kiss on kiss,

As though she wore no married-woman's dress,

As thou canst see, my Lord, in truth she wears;

Indeed, no man would touch a virgin so;

His was a harlot hug. Up comes Helkiah,

And gives your man his due, with his own staff,

Let drop through haste to have his naughty way

With my dear Mikal. Not a second lost!

Your fifty grooms rush all on poor Helkiah,

Whacking him, as my gracious Lord's self saw,

xxxI

And this is all the truth, most noble prince.  
Oh, they may hem, and interject their 'Oh's !'  
I am no liar ; ask good Rachel else,  
The same is noted for a truthful tongue.

ABSALOM\$ (To the serving man accused.)

Rascal, hast thou a word to say?

SERVING MAN

My Lord,

Indeed a word, and many words . . . .

ABSALOM

Remove him, sirs, and give him twenty stripes :

One word had been enough, had he been wronged ;

For he who needs to spin a tale, is judged.

MANY VOICES

\$ (While the serving man is carried by his fellows without the gate.)

An angel of the Lord were not more wise.

AN OLD MAN

The fellow hath his lewdness stamped on him.

ABSALOM\$ (To MIKAL.)

Good mistress, keep thy fingers from men's clothes :

Who touches lime must bear to be held foul.

\$ (Laughter.)

OLD MAN

A just rebuke.

SOME WOMEN

She's paid for being forward :

When will she dare to show her face again ?

\$ (HELKIAH pushes his wife off on the right, followed by LEAH.)

ABSALOM\$ (To his runners.)

Clear a space, for I will rest me here.—

I think they call this place the judgment seat.

\$ (He sits down on the stone seat within the gate, continuing, to an OLD ISRAELITE.)

Good father, wilt thou not sit down with me ?

Nay, be not bashful, here thy fathers sate.

XXXII

OLD MAN

But, since the king hears causes, sit no more ;  
The king is great in judgment, praised be God.

ABSALOM

And yet, mayhap, scant leisure stints the king  
Of time to hear.

OLD MAN

Too true ! an oracle !

My brother failed of justice, for that cause.

ABSALOM

Indeed, it wounds me for my father's fame :  
Come, let me hear thy worthy brother's cause.—  
Oh, ye good fathers, who have reverend beards,  
Will ye not join us, on the judgment seat,  
And help us try to so clear up this case,  
That David may be glad to right your friend,  
My friend's right worthy brother?

§ (Some dozen elders with many reverences and protestations, going back, join ABSALOM on the seat and enter into deep consultation, speaking by turns. A POOR MAN enters, coming up through the gate ; he addresses one of ABSALOM'S fellows)

POOR MAN

Sir, canst thou tell me, where that fair hall stands  
Wherein the king doth judgment?

SERVING MAN § (Pointing out and up, on the right.)

That I can ;

Yon tower, see it, covered all with shields,  
Bright bucklers that belong to mighty men ;  
Left of that tower but a little stands  
King David's hall and palace.

POOR MAN

God bless thee,

I make haste.

SERVING MAN

Wherefore, father? What's the king

To such as thou?

xxxiii

POOR MAN

My friend; I have a cause.

SERVING MAN

And thinkest thou the king hath asses' ears  
Wherein to purse up every poor man's cause?

POOR MAN

Men say, the king is just.

SERVING MAN

Canst thou pay officers?

POOR MAN

How officers?

SERVING MAN

Why, porters, ushers, eunuchs.

POOR MAN

Is justice sold in Israel?

SERVING MAN

Yea, very dear :

The king grows old, and many rogues grow fat.

POOR MAN

Then am I ruined, if thou speakest true.

SERVING MAN

Yet here be other judges at the gate ;

These reverend sires, behold if they look just.

POOR MAN

But are they strong?

SERVING MAN

Why, look at me and these,

My fellows !

POOR MAN

Then, God be praised, ye serve these fathers?

SERVING MAN

We serve lord Absalom, that sits with them,

As yonder tower in the city's midst ;

So beautiful, outshining all he sits.

POOR MAN

Lord Absalom? The king's reported wroth . . . .

xxxiv

With him?  
SERVING MAN

Well, up to Millo, if thou wilt.

POOR MAN

Nay, if I may be heard here, free of charge?

SERVING MAN

Come thou before my lord,—

Here's one that's wronged,

My lord.

ABSALOM

Let him speak boldly; judgment's free.

POOR MAN

My lord, I sold my daughter to a man,  
Most well to do, near Michmash, where I dwell.  
I sold her at a tender age, being poor,  
That he might bring her up to be his wife;  
Which thing he did, and she grew fair to see,  
Was taken to his bed and bore to him  
Fine twins; when, lo, he meets a widow, rich  
And comely, woos and takes her to himself.  
Soon, clothed in rags, my daughter seeks my house,  
With hungry children, crying she hath blows  
For every word that comes between her lips.

ABSALOM

Hast thou got witnesses will speak to this?

POOR MAN

Yes, there be many willing, but so poor  
They may not be at charge to journey hither.

ABSALOM

We will at Michmash strict inquiries make;  
Then, with these reverend fathers' help, see right  
Is measured to the poor as to the rich.  
Behold, thou mayst go up into my house  
And live well at my charge till all be done.

POOR MAN

Jehovah will reward my lord for this.

☛(Exit.)

xxxv

A MAN

Of all great David's sons this is the best.

AN ELDER

High hopes rejoice all Israel in my lord.

ABSALOM

My father, sirs, is old; pray you be just.  
Though not unjustly you complain, unheard  
Too often, as it fears me, in just suits.

§ (JOAB enters through the gate.)

I would make good his slackness all I can.—  
O worthy Joab, my most trusty friend,  
King David's perfect help and sure right hand,  
How shall I ever thank enough that man  
Who so re-knit my father's soul to mine?  
How close we sit at meat is noised abroad.  
Twelve months have proved our loves are spliced quite firm.  
So now, behold the people come to me;  
Hither they bring his court's large overflow  
Of causes still unheard and suits unpled.  
I pray thee sometimes, as thy leisure serves,  
Aid me achieve these tasks so fallen, unsought,  
To novice judgment's proof. Be mine, O thou  
My father's shield so long: although, indeed,  
I am sequestered from most gross mistakes  
By these wise heads, the sires of Israël.

§ (He and JOAB embrace.)

CERTAIN PERSONS

Behold, how dearly Joab loves him too;  
Joab, who is as David's own right hand.

JOAB

I will report these precious words, dear son  
Of a great father, unto David's ear,  
Which will rejoice thereat.

§ (Then aside to ABSALOM.)

And yet, yet, lad,  
Be not too affable; smiles soon breed words,

xxxvi

And idle words grow big with promises,  
Which bastards crowd back begging at the pinch,  
The wrongest time of all! Be circumspect;  
Let others talk; nod thou or shake thy head.

§ (Aloud.)

Even now I seek Great David to make glad  
His soul that faints beneath God's kindnesses,  
But is upheld by yet new benefits. § (Exit.)

A MAN

Indeed I will keep near Lord Absalom,  
Methinks he is well seen of all the world.

SERVING MAN

My lord, here is the prettiest case for law,  
A rosy shepherd, with a blushing bride;  
Look at these litigants, as fair as flowers  
That lean together, being weak of stalk;  
Neither could stand alone.

SHEPHERD

I can stand  
Alone.—Nay, keep thee back, Rebecca;  
Fairest of maidens, kneel before the king,  
But I will stand up, being brave, and speak.

REBECCA

Nay, my beloved, I tremble and am 'fraid  
When my arms cling not round my soul's support;  
For all these men are quite unknown to me.

SHEPHERD

How honey-sweet thy voice! O well-beloved,  
My tongue grows thick, I am in speech confused,  
As one too greedy eating honeycomb.—  
Most gracious, excellently noble lord,  
High king of Israel, lo! we love each other.

§ (Laughter.)

ABSALOM

So it would seem. What wrong is it ye suffer,  
Or rather, as I think, right well support?

xxxvii



SHEPHERD

Why, she is fair as are the stars in heaven !

ABSALOM

Thou sayest true.

SHEPHERD

And I am poor, an almost naked shepherd.

ABSALOM

Again a truth.

SHEPHERD

Gave a man all the substance of his house,

For love it would be utterly contemned :

But rich men always think to buy them love.

My lord, she will not hearken when he speaks,

But turns away and sets her thoughts on me :

Her feet looked lovely in his little shoes ;

And yet she buried them behind the wall.

My lord, behold, a lamb is not more soft ;

And yet she has been firm as bolted doors.

My lord, he touched her !

ABSALOM

A crime, that thou

Art guilty of thyself, I think.

SHEPHERD

My lord,

She loves me. Gives my fingers names

(So sweet her fancy primed with winter-tales)

According to the names of kings of old

Melchizedek, Abram, Enoch, Seth,

Lamech ; but Nimrod, sooth, she hunts for him !

The mighty hunter's nowhere to be found . . . .

But lo ! word follows word like sheep astray ;

Not one knows whither !—Loved she not, my lord,

I'd rather die than touch her 'gainst her will,

Or attempt to meet her eyes, or e'en address

One humble word that she were vexed to hear.

xxxviii

## ABSALOM

In short you would be married, but some man . . . . ?

## SHEPHERD

. . . . has bought her from her master for his bed :

Her mother, dead since, was Baal-hanan's slave

Who sells her, having daughters by his wives.

But she ran straight away at night and came

High on the hills, and hid among my sheep,

Till there I heard her sobbing. Silence lay

So deep o'er all the vales ; so many stars

Did gaze from heaven, that I lay long awake.

Anxious they seemed all gazing down at me,

So that my thoughts grew anxious and I quaked

Lest Nahor should have bought my bride with gold. .

## REBECCA

Beloved, thou saidst the great king would be old ;

And, lo, this man is young and full of might.

§ (Laughter among the crowd.)

## SHEPHERD

Indeed !

I ever heard it said, that David, now,

Was in decline—who once had been a shepherd,

And therefore did I deem he'd list to me.

§ (He gazes round in wonder at their mirth.)

Surely, of us you do not make a mock !—

My lord, we are not used to cities.

## ABSALOM

Nay

I mock thee not, nor am I yet the king ;

Absalom is my name, who, of his sons,

Stand next the throne : far gone in years of truth

Is that great David, whom thou here didst seek . . . .

But have ye naught to charge this Nahor with ?

## SHEPHERD

Nothing, my lord, beyond what he would do.

xxxix

ABSALOM. (Turning to the elders.)

My reverend fathers, what say ye to this?

AN ELDER

My lord, the man remains within his right,  
Though he use force, if he has paid her price,  
Nor may, with justice, be restrained a jot.

ABSALOM

What sayest thou, Shepherd? Thou must give her up.

REBECCA

Great lord, prince, king, or whatsoe'er thou'rt called,  
My heart spake in me as a little child;  
We did not have to plan or plot a word;  
He always has been thus, so white and ruddy;  
He did not ask me, and I did not give—  
Thy righteous God hears every word I say.  
Not forced, not asked, and seeking no exchange,  
The blue-bells lavish scent, they are so glad;  
Though sunshine warm them, though the cool dew soothe,  
For these they do not dream to pay, my lord!  
I am a girl and have no strength at all;  
My breasts are yet quite small and hard, dear king;  
What can I say! there are no words in me.  
My heart is here, to break. It breaks! it breaks!

SHEPHERD

My soul's espoused, close shut them from thy mind!  
We will die here together quite alone;  
While they throw stones we will forget them even.  
Let us sleep now; the time for strife is past;  
Four days, four nights, we journeyed hither, south,  
And I have never closed mine eyes, till now;  
For through thy sleep I watched for lions, bears,  
And ravenous men that roam abroad by night.  
My only nap was in that good man's wain,  
Who drove us past Gilboa down to Dothan.

A WOMAN

A cruel law! Their love is beautiful.

XL

ABSALOM

My lad, I like thee ; thou art comely grown.  
How much may be the sum that Nahor pays ?

SHEPHERD

My lord, he was to give up five hale ewes ;  
And one stout lusty ram, and two great skins  
Of his most choicest wine, a mighty price.  
But then ! but see ! how beautiful she is !

ABSALOM

Well, hark, I'll give thee twice that sum to pay ;  
If thou wilt be my armour-bearer, thou  
Mayst marry whom thou wilt : what sayest thou now ?

SHEPHERD

My lord, I cannot speak ; I'll kiss thy feet.

ABSALOM

Nay, boy, I'll kiss thee, also thy dear bride.  
Suffer me that I dock thy thousands, one.

A WOMAN

It is a gracious prince, most fit to rule.

A YOUNG MAN

I'll change from Adonijah's service straight,  
And in his household beg for some good place.

A YOUNG WOMAN (Pointing out ABSALOM to her companion.)

See, Zillah, how he speaks with aged men  
More courteously than suitors come to woo.

ZILLAH

True, Anna ; he hath more and lovelier hair  
Than any woman I have ever seen.

A SERVING MAN

Say, wouldst thou like to have a lock of it ?  
Come to our feast of sheep-shearers next month,  
For when he polls his head he gives to all,  
As many maids as dare to ask of him.

ANNA

Oh, I should never dare to meet his eyes.

SERVING MAN

Yes, yes, thou wouldst and pay a honeyed kiss,

XLI

And blush in view of all his feasting friends.  
ZILLAH

What, would he kiss me 'fore so many men?  
SERVING MAN

Thou sawest how he kissed the shepherdess.  
§(They go back.)

§(AHITOPHEL enters, coming from Millo; he is walking fast, and smiling to himself absorbed.)

ABSALOM§(From the back, seeing him pass.)

Ahitophel, art bidden to some wedding?

AHITOPHEL

My glad, glad tears did so confuse mine eyes  
I did not see thee—walking through this crowd,  
Was talking to myself as though alone.

§(Louder.)

Oh, I have heard fierce Joab praise a son,  
Praise a dear son to his most loving sire!  
A woman had not found such rich distress,  
Such tears, such stoppings short, and runnings on,  
Such breakings forth of platitudes past hope,  
As that old grizzled lion short of words.—  
Thou wast the tower in Millo. Oh, be sure,  
The tower glorious with a thousand shields;  
Those shields they were the facets of thy fame,  
And so thou wast a jewel: 'Blood is blood  
And Joab's Joab,' so needs be a ruby,  
A royal ruby flashing through the world  
To rouse zest, tempt heart-shaped to enterprise;  
So, straight thou wast a trumpet blaring 'War';  
But, David sighing, thou wast softened down  
Till women flocked about thee like a lute;  
Yet wast thou temperate and praised the Lord,  
Having more strings than one; and so became  
A harp where on methinks king David longs  
To set his fingers now: and all this while  
Old Joab stalked about nor could sit down.

XLII

§ (Turning to the CROWD who have been listening open-mouthed.)

Good folk, we all the men of Israël,  
Are blest, how blest! since trouble sheers away  
From o'er our heads like thunder-clouds turned back;  
That came to threaten, which repentance turned,  
Because ye did renew allegiance to  
Jehovah, Lord of Lords, and King of Kings;  
So, now the sky clears—see, yon pigeons rise  
From David's house: so may your hopes wing up.  
David is old and yet may well last long;  
But, whether now he die, or live and reign,  
Your peace is bulwarked in this noble prince  
Whose just succession dawns nor soon, nor late,  
But, granted now, in all except the name,  
Lightens your eyes and prospers all your fields;  
That name he doth not covet, nay, doth pray  
It may live long with David, safe in trust.  
But 'tis high noon; there is scant shelter here,  
So get ye to your homes, whose doors secure  
Look never more to hear rude summons at.

§ (THE PEOPLE as they disperse shout:

Long live Lord Absalom, who shall be king.

Which cry coming from diverse companies at several times is so  
crossed and mixed as that at last some seem to shout:

Long live king Absalom.) §

ABSALOM § (When the noise has died away.)

My ears have heard it:

'Long live king Absalom.' Ahitophel,  
Thou art an angel! In paradise I walk.  
Adam was not more happy, lord of all;  
No serpents will I hear and eat no fruit  
Forbidden by dread God; I will do good  
Continually, and mend my smallest faults;  
Justice my sceptre—courage my crown shall be;  
Tyre's wealth shall flood Jerusalem with joy.  
Where first begin?—My armour-bearer, ho!

What is thy name, boy?  
SHEPHERD

Lemuël, my lord.

ABSALOM

Dost see these fifty fellows, Lemuël?  
I make thee lord of them. Thou hast kept sheep;  
It is my pleasure thou shouldst shepherd these.  
Art thou afraid?

LEMUEL

Not much of them, my lord.

ABSALOM

Thou tremblest, boy; I think, thou art afraid,  
And of them too; see, how they edge about  
And shuffle round thy girl.

LEMUEL

My lord, a man  
From Heleph came to steal; I fought with him  
Up by the lonely fold, and, in the dark  
I tripped him up and knelt upon him down,  
Thrashing with leather sling until he roared;  
For so the Lord made my heart brave to do,  
That God whose might to David stooped Goliath.  
And with his help could I thrash one of these.

ABSALOM

One, but thou tremblest at them all?

LEMUEL

My Lord,

I am a lad, these men are city bred.  
I of their manners little know—would learn  
Somewhat before I take so great command.

ABSALOM

Out on thee, boy! it is the soul commands!  
Thou art not great of heart. Go, lead these home;  
And if they misbehave, pray to have wit  
At least to hide thy fears.—Obey him, sirs.

♣ (Exit LEMUEL and RUNNERS.)

XLIV

§ (To AHITOPHEL.)

My blood is greater and rebels not in me ;  
Fear is stamped out ; I turn to foreign foes ;  
There are no near ones left can match a king.

AHITOPHEL

My lord, though I have been thy friend till now,  
I dare not trust me farther in thy cause :  
I am afraid.

ABSALOM

Ahitophel ! what next ?

AHITOPHEL

O my good lord, thy brothers live all round ;  
Jerusalem is not the utmost world.  
This joyful day will breed more foes than friends ;  
Aroused thus all the princes will, forthwith,  
Commence to countermine. I fear to speak ;  
For walls have ears ! This is a dawn, my lord,  
Must blush far redder ere it will be day,  
And even then may not be sure to shine.  
While time allows, curb in that bounding spirit.  
At Hebron have I many faithful friends ;  
Judah is not too pleased, that David, whom  
They chiefly raised to power, should hold them now  
But one of twelve good tribes ; this jealousy  
Already have I warmed : make some excuse,  
A vow to pay or what may give pretext  
To expend good cheer, and shortly come to Hebron.  
Thy annual feasts have pleased the country folk ;  
We will send embassies to all the tribes,  
Advising such as hold themselves for wisest,  
How likely is a change on times long quiet,—  
How that such number in a king's sons doth  
Imperil peace ; while the succession hangs,  
A thing for the decision of a day,  
That nears and should make anxious men of sense.  
These gentle spies shall, last, drop hint of—Yea,

XLV



But not discover this good remedy.  
 By fifty fools arrived at fifty times  
 'T will more convince than Urim—namely this,  
 That thou be crowned before the old king die.  
 And we may count on all who beg us join  
 In our own plot : they will be there, what day  
 Our trumpets blare in Hebron. Think of this.  
 A week or even two thou mayest sit here  
 And gratiate thyself with simple folk ;  
 But ere commotion gathers to a head  
 Thou must remove, and give thy brothers room  
 To spend their spleen in words that beat the air.  
 At Hebron put thou on the judge once more.  
 Thy brothers will not heed the thing so much,  
 Deeming thy flight concession to their powers.  
 In time to soothe their young alarms take wing  
 And come to Hebron. So farewell, my lord ;  
 That we work singly will a colour lend  
 Of plain intentions. So, farewell, my lord ;  
 My mule awaits me just beyond the Gate.

☛(Exit.)

#### ABSALOM

This place turns round ; the sun is over hot ;  
 Dizzy am I : a taste makes dry my mouth :  
 But I will do his bidding ; he is wise.

☛(The CURTAIN drops.)

#### ACT II. SCENE III.

☛The ford of Kidron occupies the front of the stage, so that those on the right are on the Jerusalem side, but those on the left stand at the foot of Olivet, which occupies the background, and round which the brook winds to disappear ; the road mounts Olivet from the extreme left towards the right, where it is seen to pass beyond the brow ; beyond which again is a far steeper hill whereon is seen a rugged goat-path. BENAIAH leading the Cherethites and Pelethites enters on the right, crosses the ford, and mounts the hill, over which they all disappear. Meanwhile many families,

XLVI

coming the same way, are straggled up the hill or crossing the ford, with mules, and slaves, and baggage. DAVID, riding a mule, enters on the right, and by his side JOAB, ABISHAI, ITTAI the Gittite, and other captains on foot.

DAVID. (To ITTAI. Stopping his mule.)

No farther, Ittai, no farther; get thee back;  
Why shouldst thou also toil with us? Return,  
And keep thine office near this younger king.  
Since thou, a stranger, art not one of us,  
Seek thou king Absalom whose fortunes rise—  
Who has been crowned in Hebron. All the tribes  
Avow them his; young men by nature do,  
And old men feelingly mistrust old age.  
Dost thou not serve for fortune? Mine is lost;  
If thou but yesterday hadst come to me,  
Should I this day make thee go up and down?  
And what are three parts of a life to blood?  
Blood is the bond, and even blood is loose.  
Behind thee profit lies: fly not thy good,  
Seeing I go not any whither now;  
My destination doth not crown this hill,  
Nor yet the next; but whither I may, I go.  
Take back thy brethren then. Mercy and Truth  
Be with thee, Ittai.

ITTAI

As the Lord

Liveth, and as my lord the king liveth,  
In whate'er place my lord the king shall be,  
Whether in death or life, in that place also,  
Thy servant, Ittai, shall be.

DAVID. (To ITTAI, who leads his band of fifty Gittites over the ford, followed by their families.)

Then go;

Pass over, Ittai, thou and thy friends,  
Thy women, and thy little ones. Pass on.—  
Ye weep, my friends, and all my people weep,

XLVII

But I not yet, knowing no cause to weep :  
 For that my son inherits me is well ;  
 After the father should the son be king :  
 That youth is hasty hath been known of old.  
 My care is only this, to save your lives.  
 ♀ (To ZADOK, who enters on the right with ABIATHAR.)  
 What ! hast thou come, good Zadok ? What is that,  
 Thy holy Levites carry with such care ?  
 The ark ? Oh, no ! Disturb not great God's ark,  
 Nor bring it into danger, where ill deeds  
 Do drive us. Take it back : my son may need  
 To feel the Lord with him yet more than I ;  
 But, if the Lord doth truly favour me,  
 He will then bring me back and show me both  
 His holy habitation and his ark,  
 So blessed once more. But in the case he say  
 'I have no longer joy in David.' Why !  
 Here am I, let him do as seemeth good  
 To him, for surely I am in his hand.  
 And Zadok, art thou not a seer ? In peace  
 Return, and fear no violence ; men will  
 Respect thee yet ; that holy title wards  
 Thine aged bosom better than our spears.  
 Good holy men, take your two sons with you,  
 Ahimaaz thy son and Jonathan  
 (That name is sweet with memories for me)  
 The son of good Abiathar—and mark :  
 I do intend to tarry in the plain  
 Skirting the wilderness, until there come  
 Tidings from you to certify what falls ;  
 Your lads must bring them—for my hot-head son  
 Lacks counsel, tastes new wine ; with likelihood  
 All ends well yet : if he drink deep enough  
 And let his eager haste undo his strength  
 (He has not with him one experienced friend)  
 We'll catch him in a noose and let him prance

XLVIII

Till, wearied out, he falls, and then correct him.—  
I would I saw Ahitophel here now!

**ZADOK**

My lord the king has spoken very well.  
And, though I fain would stay to comfort here,  
I bear the ark away; nor deem bereft  
Of comfort and support thy cause, my king.—  
A right mind is an ark, the which our God  
Has consecrated to contain his wealth;  
Cherubs no less do shelter it with wings:  
The minds of fools must ever lack a lid,  
Or have such covers as slam in the wind,  
Unhinged, unfastened. Keep, keep ye secret still  
Your treasure, O ye sons of Israël;  
Pry not therein, as they of Kirjath-jearim;  
Still less reveal to impious foreign eyes  
(As happened when in battle lost the ark  
Brought down stone-Dagon all except his stump,  
And plagued the Philistines): then ne'er reveal  
The secrets of thy nation or thy breast;  
Keep them for ever! Jehovah long has loved,  
Nor is he fickle, or of little might;  
But brought you up from Egypt: fear and serve him.  
And so farewell.

**ALL THE PEOPLE**

God save his people, Israël.

§ (ZADOK turns and goes out. DAVID slowly crosses the ford,  
when a man running on from the right catches him up on the further  
bank.)

**MESSENGER**

My lord, Ahitophel of Giloh's turned,  
And is with Absalom to counsel him.

**DAVID**

O Lord, my God, I pray to foolishness  
Turn thou the counsel of Ahitophel!  
Most awful God, be even with this traitor,

Thou only canst.—

O Policy, O Cunning,  
Have I then treated with thee for thy love  
As with a little child, e'en smiled on Cunning?  
Took I a step beyond these times in hope?  
Have I leaned from my poor ill-built past  
As from a tower-top, and leaned too far,  
Fain of the arms of angels passing on  
Winged for a later time and better men;  
And falling do I drag those ill-squared deeds  
About mine ears in ruin to the ground?  
Punished indeed, condemned to death not yet.—  
I will not ride but slowly walk; 'tis meet  
In those condemned. I will not lead the way,  
But be the last, the almost-left-behind,  
That best would please indeed by being lost.

§ (The others leading the mule begin to ascend the hill, except  
JOAB, who waits by DAVID'S side.)

The Lord hath brought his prophecies to pass;  
The sword is naked in my house once more.  
Help me remove my shoes; these stones are rough.

JOAB

The better reason for stout soles, my lord.

DAVID

Not so, good Joab; help me as I say.

JOAB

My lord, thy wits do wander; 'tis the sun  
That rides the ridge of noon; on thy great grief  
His heat prevails, as 'neath a caldron coals,  
Till it give off a steam that mists thy sense.

DAVID

Joab, had I said, 'Seest thou yonder goat?  
Go cut its throat, and sprinkle this my path.'  
It had been done by now; but since I say,  
'Help me unlace this sandal,' I am mad.

L

JOAB

My lord, I do not understand thy words,  
And so suppose they wander from true sense.

DAVID

Though Saul was mad, yet Abner served him well.

JOAB

My brother and thy servants wait, my lord.  
Shall we not catch them up?

DAVID (Rising bare-foot.)

Man, beware;

I asked thee for a simple kindness. Thou  
Refused'st it; though I were mad, 't were one.  
I fear thee as I feared Ahitophel;  
Thou think'st to read my mind better than I,  
As he beheld my profit in a course  
Eschewed of my best pondered purposes.  
Pride is not power nor haste speed. Though I  
Walk humbled, lame, man, what is that to thee?  
These aged feet, that brave the brunt of shocks  
From cruel stones, speak louder to the Lord  
Than all thy savage deeds. O Joab, Joab,  
I am afraid of God and lack all surety  
Of favour from on high: then I do well  
To foot it humbly with a contrite heart.  
Shall I, who have so served the Lord so long,  
And yet who have so justly angered him,  
Pretend to confidence or cast my service now  
And bow to Baäl, since I am not paid  
For my good tender first, but things ill done  
Bear down his anger? Nay, if he see this,  
Bethinking him again of all my best,  
He will forgive me, as I Absalom,  
Did he forsake his froward pride, would e'en  
Forgive. There is no profit in revenge  
Either for God or man. But to compel  
A rebel to repent, make enemies good friends,

LI

Bad servants anxious to do well—in these  
Who is so blind as not to spy advantage?  
Then think not ill of me, still less of God,  
But love me, Joab, and love God; and I  
Hold thee heart-bound for ever.

**JOAB**

Good my lord;  
Thou dost see far into the ways of God:  
Methinks revenge is sweet to aged men;  
God is from aye and vengeance proper to him.  
When I was young I let the vanquished live,  
Thinking to gain more glory later on  
From his renewed defeat. But now I think  
Next year I may be weaker just so much,  
And with contentment watch him agonise:  
His death doth pledge me safety that amount.  
Yet I am blind; lead me who stumble else.  
’Twas ever thus in all our escapades  
And blood-embued adventures; what I thought  
Did prove but foolish by thy counsel’s side.  
But, see, thy friend good Hushai draweth near,  
His coat is rent, there’s earth upon his head!

§ (During the above HUSHAI has entered from over the brow.)

**DAVID**

Joab, thy soul preferreth Absalom  
Unto his father won away by peace;  
A warrior is he after thine own heart.

**JOAB** § (Kneeling.)

Upon my knees, my lord, the past doth live—  
Doth shake my whole soul as no new thing can.  
I have seen David’s deeds unmatchable,  
Since when his name was novel on men’s lips;  
And envy, every day of all those years,  
With love hath striven, and love born off the palm.  
Why should I prize this locust clad in mail,  
Born yesterday and doomed to die to-morrow?

LII

DAVID

O Joab, Joab, do not say to-morrow.  
His death and mine, each critical for each,  
Are yoked ; his life and mine far-sundered stray :  
Slaying me, why, he were but dead, I think ;  
The Lord, whose vengeance is, must needs avenge  
A father's blood : and if he die, I die.

HUSHAI. (Who has come down the hill from the brow.)

My lord, dost thou not see thy friend, or is  
Thy grief too great ?—Most lamentable tears,  
Why rush ye thus to David's royal eyes  
Now when he sees me, being absent erst ?

DAVID

Good Hushai, friend, well known, well seen, art thou ;  
My tearful eyes protest not 'gainst thy face,  
Which long loved is loved yet, but they protest  
Against a heart divided in itself ;  
Even my heart that, old, is reft in twain.  
Good Hushai, thou that art a peaceful man,  
Art no-way useful in the bucklered ranks ;  
Since thou, like Isaac, hast been blessed through peace.  
At my side, who have been a man of blood,  
Thou wilt but be a burden : mine intent  
Being to shed more blood, my forced intent,  
Alas !

But Absalom hath need of one like thee.  
Say thus : ' As I have been thy father's servant, I  
Will be thy servant also now, O king.'  
Then mayest thou defeat Ahitophel,  
Who is the enemy whom most I fear :  
Dissuade from all his plans whate'er they be ;  
Comfort my son in vanity ; gain time ;  
Vaunt distant feats o'er deeds immediate ;  
And, sanguine of events, advise smooth things,  
Cheerful, zealous, plausible.—Hast thou not there  
Zadok, also Abiathar, the priests ?

LIII



Therefore, whate'er thou at the king's house learn'st,  
Thou shalt impart to them, who privily  
Will unto me dispatch their light-foot sons.  
Thus Absalom, my son, may be chastised,  
But spared unto mine age. It should be tried :  
The Lord is very watchful how we walk.

#### HUSHAI

Even as an angel of the Lord, my lord  
Shall be obeyed. § (He starts down the hill.)

God prosper thy smooth tongue.

§ (DAVID slowly now obtains the brow of the hill, where  
ABISHAI and the other captains have waited, but constantly gazing  
after HUSHAI, who crosses the ford and goes off on the right.  
He says with frequent breaks.)

#### DAVID

A simple soul, the safest noose for guile.  
Dear good old man, so open in his age,  
Most full of words ; I've hugged myself with laughter  
To hear him run on, many a time : indeed,  
A babbling babe stocked with an old wife's tales ;  
Inconsequent to all save what's last said,  
His anecdotes drift in the breath of chat.

He is like snow, a white and gentle comer.

Simplicity is very near to God.

Ahitophel will sink through this fair trap  
As did the lion in Benaiah's pit,—  
Who dug deep down, what time the gentle snow  
Fell softly, rested well on light twigg'd wands  
As on firm earth, and had a simple look,  
So that the lion doubted not at all.

This guileless soul will seem the unlikeliest spy,  
And put a smooth face on the pit of death,  
Wherein my enemy will, presently,

Cry loud.—Great God, I thank thee for this sign.

§ (ZIBA appears on the brow from the other side.)

LIV

DAVID§ (Looking over towards the right.)  
What do yon asses there? They stop my folk  
In yonder bottom.

ZIBA§ (Prostrating himself.)  
My lord, the asses are  
To carry all the household of the king.

DAVID  
Servant of Saul, where is thy master's son?

ZIBA  
He tarries at Jerusalem, my lord.

DAVID  
He tarries?

ZIBA  
He abides, my lord, in truth.

DAVID  
All that was Meribaäl's now is thine.  
This Meribaäl, halt Meshiboeth,  
Whom I did make to sit at meat with me,  
Whom I did honour for his father's sake,  
Even Jonathan, mine own most best beloved,  
What, doth this lame dog bite?—

Joab, my friend,  
If thou dost find him in a likely place  
Thou mayest be rigorous.

§ (A stone is cast at DAVID.)  
DAVID My God! my God!

§ (Other stones.)

SHIMEI§ (Seen on the further ridge, shouts.)  
Come out, come out, thou bloody man! Thou man  
Of Belial! On thee the Lord returns  
The blood, even all the blood of Saul  
And of his house, in whose stead thou hast reigned.  
Into the hands of Absalom, thy son,  
The Lord delivers now thy kingdom up:  
Behold, art thou not taken in thy guile,  
Because thou art a bloody man?

## ABISHAI

My lord,  
Why should this dead dog curse? I pray thee now,  
Let me go over and take off his head.

## DAVID

Abishai, and ye my servants all,  
Behold, the son that came forth from my bowels  
Seeketh my life, how much more then may not  
This Benjamite? Let him alone, I say;  
Let him curse on, if so it please the Lord.  
☛ (Taking their shields from their armour-bearers, they hold them  
over DAVID and disappear beyond the brow.)

## SHIMEI

Thou bloody man, where now are Rizpah's sons?  
Her prayers have surely come before God's face,  
Even the prayers of Saul's dear concubine.  
☛ (The CURTAIN descends.)

### ACT III. SCENE I.

§ David's Palace. Time, afternoon. A room on a lower level and divided from the council-hall by wooden columns; between the two centre of these four or five steps lead up. On either side of this stair are divans which run along the base of a trellis forming a balustrade between the columns of the hall above, from which a half light penetrates to the inner room. A curtain is drawn at the top of the steps: cushions and shawls litter the divans. Enter a CONCUBINE from the right. §

#### FIRST CONCUBINE

I have been down into the limpid bath;  
The water was quite still; the walls of stone  
Kept silence; I nor splashed, nor laughed, nor swam,  
But listened to my heart: at last it seemed,  
My heart did speak with words that broken said,  
'Wast thou not once a child?' Then I felt old,  
Older than what I am, and reached the side  
And sat me there and wept; for I was sad.—  
An empty palace is a mournful place!

§ (She goes out by the opposite door)

§ (A second CONCUBINE enters from the left.)

#### SECOND CONCUBINE

I have been listening by the closet doors,  
And fast locked chests. The precious stones had heard  
My soft approach and they were silent all;  
The diamonds and rubies did not talk;  
The green-eyed emeralds laughed for wickedness,  
To think how I was listening all in vain;  
But limpid topazes have never tongues,  
Searched easily through and through; their silence lives  
And weighs no jot on them; 't is like a song  
Whose words the singer heeds not, being too glad.  
I have heard tell how wise are amethysts  
To find hid treasure, changing colour straight.  
Some stone there is that doth discover crimes;  
Another, sullen, tests virginity.—

'T is lonely here; I'll seek the others out.

§● (She goes out on the right.)

§● (Two CONCUBINES enter meeting, severally:

Ruth!

Merab dear!)

MERAB

Let us keep company.

RUTH

Shall we be slain by this king Absalom?

We are too old to please so young a man.

MERAB

Not all so old; besides we are well kept.

I have been dressing at Bath-Sheba's mirror

And used her ointments. Smell! Is it not rare?

I came no sweeter into David's arms,

A virgin having just my thirteen years:

His heart was glad thereat.—This is her comb.

RUTH

See here this undervest—'tis a choice cloth

And has been charmed against untoward things,

Chiefly, I think, 'gainst snakes; but it scares fleas:

'Tis Abigail's, who was a rich man's wife;

'Twas hers before she came to David's bed.

MERAB

It is a treasure. Let's to the kitchens now.

§● (They go out together; after a little another CONCUBINE enters, but, hearing a distant noise, runs across the stage and off; presently three CONCUBINES enter excitedly.)

SIXTH CONCUBINE

They come, a sea of people.

SEVENTH CONCUBINE

Hark, their trumpets.

EIGHTH CONCUBINE

This son of David is a glorious man.

SIXTH CONCUBINE

What shall we do?

LVIII

## EIGHTH CONCUBINE

Oh, let us hide ourselves !

## SEVENTH CONCUBINE

Nay, that were foolish ; rather make us fair,  
So shall we be entreated well of men ;  
Come let us find adornments quickly, veils,  
Bright girdles, bracelets, shawls and quilted slippers :  
We may be queens to-day.

§ (They go out : LEMUEL with his crowd of porters fills the council-chamber above.)

## LEMUEL

Brisk, fellows, sharp ! set up these o'er-turned seats.—  
You, help me drape this dais.

§ (After a few minutes.)

Not so much noise.

§ (One of them comes through the curtain, LEMUEL following.)

Sir, stay you there.

§ (Thrusting him back, then turning himself he looks about.)

This is a queen's apartment, sweet with musk ;  
Here will I bring Rebecca, my beloved ;  
She shall be queen and on plump cushions sit  
And warm her hands at fretted casolettes  
When evening damps strike chill.

§ (He returns to the hubbub in the next room, and in a little while re-enters with REBECCA.)

Rebecca, see, this cushion's blue as Heaven,  
Thereon shalt thou be star ; but, yet, methinks  
Thou wert a lily on this lovely green,  
Might tempt an angel risk his throne to tend thee ;  
So sit thou here. I must be quick away !—  
This crimson is most sumptuous ; thou wouldst lie  
On this, a cherub on a western cloud !—  
But I must get me back ; those fellows quarrel ;—  
Yet first will drape this silken shawl o'er thee,  
That thou mayest look like Abram's royal tent,  
Pitched in Beer-Sheba, holding far more wealth

Than in the citadels of neighbouring kings  
Could well be found; the Lord so blessed him there.—  
But what a din! indeed, I should be gone.—  
One kiss, Rebecca, mine, not Isaac's wife;  
Another; 't is to last may be for hours.—  
The trumpets! hark! I shall be whipped for this,  
So make it healing for the stripes 't will cost.—  
Make it all balm and myrrh and frankincense,  
A posset for a king.—

Trumpets, too harsh,

Here is my lute that conquers all my will . . . .

REBECCA

Lemuël, make haste; thy lord will whip thee else;  
Leave me, leave me!

LEMUEL

Cruel Rebecca, wouldst thou be alone?

REBECCA

O Lemuël, thou mak'st me weep for thee;  
Hark, they are in the court, thou wilt earn stripes;  
Too costly! these kisses seem to savour tears.

LEMUEL

Think of my love and lonely wear a smile.

§ (He runs out; a little later all the ten CONCUBINES enter  
at once.)

SECOND CONCUBINE

Didst thou behold him riding his proud horse?

MERAB

Of course, of course; we all beheld the king

EIGHTH CONCUBINE

His hair hung round his waist in one vast cape.

RUTH

Ye handmaids of the king, say, who is this,

That sits beside the trellis looking through?

§ (REBECCA turns her head quickly and back again.)

FIRST CONCUBINE

She's timid as a little girl from home.

LX

## EIGHTH CONCUBINE

She is some concubine of this new king's.

RUTH

And passing fair.

MERAB

Indeed ! I like her not.

SEVENTH CONCUBINE

Surely, a concubine were not so shy :

She hath a virgin air.

MERAB

Go pull her shawl back that we see her face.

SIXTH CONCUBINE

It fears me she might cry and some one hear.

MERAB

Thou needst not hurt her ; there, see, gently, oh,  
What blushes !

§ (She has pulled REBECCA'S shawl aside, who hastily replaces it, and turns once more to the trellis. The train of ABSALOM have by this time filled the council-chamber, where a confusion of voices still prevails.)

RUTH

Who art thou, maiden, and to whom belongest ?

REBECCA

O daughters of Jerusalem, I am

Good Lemuël's wedded wife.

MERAB

And who is he ?

REBECCA

O daughters of Jerusalem, he is

An armour-bearer to king Absalom.

SEVENTH CONCUBINE

Nay, let us watch them, in the council-hall ;

Already are they seated : leave this girl.

§ (Collecting at the trellis on the opposite side of the door to that on which REBECCA sits, they peer through.)

LXI



**ABSALOM** (Who has taken a seat on the right, just above **REBECCA**.)

The Lord hath shown his pleasure, I am king;  
Our Heralds are sent forth, we wax apace;  
Each minute brings its man, and every hour  
Is marked by the arrival of a band; the watch  
Is set and quarters served, appointments dealt  
To officers, while calm our first day ends.  
My father fell in years; much wrong was done,  
Not chargeable upon so great an age,  
But perilous no less to Jacob's seed:  
In peace eschewing bloodshed am I risen.  
We had not thought to affright these aged men;  
Their flight has changed the aspect of our act,  
But not its nature. Still we love them well  
And, grieved at misconception, must pursue  
And make them prisoners, that they never be  
A cause of faction, but die loved in peace.

**HUSHAI** (Who appears on the left between the columns of the hall.)  
God save the King.

**ALL THE PEOPLE**

God save king Absalom.

**ABSALOM**

Is this thy kindness to thy friend; too quick,  
O Hushai! Nay, for those who loved him so  
I did not yet expect to come to me.  
Why wentest thou not with thine aged friend?

**HUSHAI**

Nay, whom the Lord, this people and the men  
Of Israel have chosen, his I am; with him  
My heart abides. Again, whom should I serve?  
Should he not wait in presence of the son,  
Who in the father's presence came and went?  
So will I in thy palace, my sweet lord.

**ABSALOM**

Thou art a wise man, surely, white as snow;

**LXII**

I have not many so experienced heads ;  
So thou shalt sit next to Ahitophel,  
In counsel being heard next after him,  
The guide of my young feet until this hour ;  
Which but for him had scarcely prospered so.

AHITOPHEL. (Rising between columns on the left, but close to the centre curtain.)

O king, the God of Israël, not I,  
Did this. He gave me wisdom all I have :  
And, now, not looking here, I look to him,  
Asking that counsel which I am to give.—  
Thou art a king ; yet issue?—none is thine.  
But thou hast raised a pillar to thy name.  
None is too few ; too plenteous David's was ;  
Thine fails for want. I gather from good friends  
(Such have I found in nearly all men met  
For whom I bless Jehovah, Lord of Hosts)  
That David left within ten concubines  
To air the rooms and dust the furniture  
And give alarm against chance pilferers,  
The Lord might bless my lord in one of these . . . .  
Ah, start not thus as from a deed abhorred !  
'Ahitophel is wise,' full oft thou sayest ;  
Then do believe that wisdom solely points  
To plain smooth paths of safety—views no end  
But blessed prosperity. The old weak king  
Must by his flight outlaw thine act and thee  
By just so much as his success makes plain  
The will of God ; then he must not succeed,  
Nor will he ; hast thou never understood  
How that Jehovah will not be half-served  
But doth demand his utmost from each man ?  
Did not Saul palter, was not Eli found  
Too fond a father to be just as judge ?  
Yet Eli was an old and reverend man.  
Nathless God stayed not for what honoured him,

LXIII

The past, but for faults senile brake his neck.  
 Save thou thy father from so sad a fate.  
 O tempt him not, by letting his hopes grow,  
 To cling to powers now far beyond his strength  
 And which the Lord delivers unto thee  
 That thou in turn may'st serve him in men's view.  
 Shouldst thou permit those labouring in mistake,  
 As David and his friends do labour now,  
 To wax in number, all will join with them :  
 For fast increasing doth beget increase.  
 Man moves with man. Thy father's very wise,  
 Will profit even by his son's success ;  
 Be ours to equal him in policy,  
 Doubtless he prompts men : ' I have loved this son ;  
 Shall I not pardon now, and with him those  
 He leads astray ? ' there stops ; and such as doubt,  
 Think this is how the upset will fall square ;  
 As both do love the other ; joining David  
 As willingly as thee, since all is one,  
 Not mindful whose the future is, nor who  
 Has numbers, all indifferent to signs ;  
 More brave behind the Cherethites such feel,  
 And trust themselves among the Pelethites,  
 Step out, led on by famed Abishai,  
 Find confidence in seeing Joab busy,  
 Feel very lucky near the Gibborim,  
 Holding the Gittites dearer than their kin :  
 With gay glib tongues they noise such thoughts abroad,  
 In conversation plume themselves for seers.  
 Then will your friends perchance give ear to them  
 And fall away. But if men say of thee,  
 ' His father doth abhor him ; know ye not,  
 He lay with his own father's concubines ? '  
 Then shall division, strictlier defined  
 Between ye, leave him weakest far ; then shall  
 The hands of all that are with thee be strong.

## ABSALOM

Ahitophel, thy words reveal the truth ;  
Affection in my heart had overlayed  
My father's dark unfathomable mind ;  
Doubtless, as thou hast seen, he founds deep hopes.—  
Then spread a tent upon the roof for me,  
That in the sight of gathered Israël  
I may do this, and clinch their minds with proof.—  
Go find these concubines and bring them there,  
When I shall go above. Stay yet a while,  
For Hushai would speak too.—What canst thou say?

HUSHAI. (Rising between the columns on the extreme left.)

Oh, listen never to such wickedness !  
The heathen even rarely do such things ;  
Although a man in Askalon, they say—  
But never mind, abominable was he,  
And shall be ever held ; for he was cursed,  
By mad dog bit some summers later on ;—  
They say the child is now a slave in Tyre.  
My lord, my lord, I know not what to say.

## ABSALOM

Good man, why, so it seems ! Hushai, we laugh !  
Ahitophel is wiser far than thou.  
I will have all the dogs in Israël killed,  
If thou hast truly fear some chance mad hound,  
Some summers later on . . . there's time enough.

## HUSHAI

This laughter hath an evil ring, my Lord ;  
To-day with gay, to-morrow rhymes with sorrow.

ABSALOM. (Mocking him,)

The young rejoice ; the aged curse the noise.  
Thou hast learned David's pastime, silly rhyme.—  
Lemuël, begone and do as I have said.

LEMUEL. (With two or three PORTERS comes through the curtain,  
then turning back.)

My lord, the women are all listening here.

**ABSALOM**

'Tis well, make haste and spread a sumptuous tent.  
May be, the Lord will grant me issue now;  
Success with generous warmth elates my blood.

**MERAB**

I pray thee, sir, let me the first go up.

**SEVENTH CONCUBINE**

Nay, let me be the first.

**EIGHTH CONCUBINE**

Nay me.

'Tis mine by right;

**FIFTH CONCUBINE**

I am the youngest far.

**LEMUEL**

Shame on ye, women! are ye all so bad?

**MERAB**

Nay, sir, I pray thee take this necklace, sir;  
The beads are gold of Ophir; 'tis of price,  
And would look fair upon thy fair bride's neck.

**REBECCA** (To LEMUEL, who hesitates.)

O Lemuël, turn thine eyes from wanton eyes;  
Think not of gold; thine arms my necklace are.

**LEMUEL**

Let us go up and spread the tent at once,  
Not waste the time with women here.

**RUTH**

Good sir,

Allow me lead the way; I'll show thee where  
The tents are kept, beds, pillows, sheets, ropes; come!

§ (She leads LEMUEL and his MEN out on the right.)

**MERAB** (Who has crossed close to REBECCA.)

There, take thou that, for moving 'gainst my suit.

§ (REBECCA gives a little cry.)

**MERAB**

Ha, ha, the pin is poisoned, little fool!

♫ (Returning to the others while REBECCA begins to sob under her shawl.)

Thou well mayest weep against thy burial.

ABSALOM ♫ (His voice making itself heard from the upper room.)

Again thou sayest true, Ahitophel ;

I have no captain like Abishai ;

None equals Joab here, Benaiah none—no troop

Have I like Ittai's famed band ; still less

Have thirty Gibborim. My hopes rushed on

Too fast.

AHITOPHEL

My lord, not fast enough.

ABSALOM

How so ?

AHITOPHEL

I should be posting even now, with all

Thy bravest friends, and nearing on their flight ;

So coming suddenly among their rout,

One blow, struck as it were by accident,

Might bring thee Joab and Abishai,

And Ittai with all his famous band,

And Gibborim no less than thirty captains

Doughty in battle.

ABSALOM

What ! Should David fall ?

AHITOPHEL

Joab slew Abner basely :

David had sunk the house of Saul in blood

Ere his throne felt secure.

Yet God both pardoned him and blessed his reign.

Should David fall, thou wert securely king.

God will not be half-served : he did demand

Of Abraham when old his only son.

Thy father's days to come can be a loss

By no means of such magnitude, besides,

May save him from God's judgment, yea, prevent

That he like Eli fall from off his throne

LXVII

Struck down by him he served so long and well,  
Because he, being judge, yet proved remiss  
When fond paternity pled for those two,  
Hophni and Phineas, sons of Belial.  
Not Ammon only David's weakness spares,  
But all the stiff-necked count him their fond sire  
Whose mildness doth beget their confidence.  
I pray my lord's permission to set out.

#### ABSALOM

Oh, not so fast; I have not thought of this.  
Let me hear Hushai; for he may be wise.

#### HUSHAI

O king, thy father is a mighty man,  
And Joab and Abishai like lions;  
And as a bear robbed of her whelps, in mind  
So be they chafed, and moody prowl apart.  
They, being men of war, will never lodge  
Pell-mell with folk and baggage. When we met,  
He said he would not have me go with him;—  
For I did offer first, O king, to him,  
Mindful how deep I stood in benefits;—  
He scowled, I should but burden his designs;  
For he will not be burdened with much folk!  
Behold he is, by this, hid in some pit  
Or in some other place, Adullam's match,  
Engedi's parallel: and it will be,  
Then, when Ahitophel and his brave friends  
Have slain some slaves or women of the rout  
And are disordered, he will out on them;  
If thus some few are overthrown at first,  
'Twill come to pass that all who hear of it,  
Will say, 'There is a slaughter 'mong the folk  
Of Absalom;' then, he, the valiant, also,  
Whose heart is like a lion, utterly  
Shall melt to hear it: for all Israël knows  
Thy father is a doughty man and they

LXVIII

That follow with him all are mighty men.  
Therefore I counsel that all Jacob's tribes  
Be generally gathered unto thee,  
From Dan even to Beersheba as the sand  
That is by the sea-side for multitude;  
And that thou go to battle like a King,  
In thine own person. We shall come on him  
Then in some place, wherever he be found,  
And light upon him as the dew that falleth,  
Even so universally on all the ground;  
Then shall of him and all the men with him  
Be nowhere found so much as one, O king,  
Thou shalt have blood and booty, prisoners or  
Most contrite foes for friends, at choice, great king.  
Moreover, if he be got to a city,  
Then shall the tribes bring to that city ropes  
And we will draw it down into some river,  
Until there be not one small stone found there.

#### ABSALOM

Ay, even so; then will I march on Tyre;  
Leading that host, victorious to the last,  
Trample all Egypt like a threshing floor:  
I will set sons to reign in Sheba; yea,  
In Saba's self my son shall wear a crown;  
The isles shall send their wealth in ships to me;  
And every man of Israël seem a prince  
So lordly his attire, so rich his house.—  
This counsel doth surpass Ahitophel's.

#### MANY VOICES

Indeed it pleases all who hear, O king.

AHITOPHEL. (Drawing back the curtain and coming through.)

My lord, look in on mighty David's house,  
It is all dark and not half finished yet:  
The wind moans through its storeys, swings its doors;  
I hear king Hiram's builders—David's foot!  
Hark, on the roof he paces to and fro;



He watches them, impatiently, at work ;  
His house must stand for generations ; yet  
'Tis but half built . . Listen, my lord, he walks !

**ABSALOM**

Why, that is Lemuel's foot ! Ahitophel  
Is put beside himself to be o'er-ruled,  
And like a girl is sudden in device  
To win attention from her rival back ;  
Sees ghosts, or faints, or cries ' An asp ! an asp !'

**RUTH** (Returns carrying a flagon of wine and crosses the stage to the kitchens.)

**AHITOPHEL** (Turning towards Absalom.)

Wisdom is like a girl, a little child,  
A patient ass, a docile lamb ; she has  
No proper face but looks through many eyes ;  
And standing here, O king, my wisdom faints  
And, dizzy, holds these posts in fear to fall,  
Like to a woman taken with her pains,  
Or like a girl who learns she is betrayed,  
Or as great Samson suffering in the dark,  
Hearing a careless laughter, fed on him,  
Jibe and grow loud—grapples the props of hopes  
Doomed to fall in on those who raised them up.  
This, David's house, is thine to roof and prop ;  
Buttress it well, cement it, even with blood ;  
If it shall last, blood must, indeed, be shed  
For favour from the Everlasting God,  
That he permit encroachment on those titles  
His only to the end. As Abraham did,  
Far gone in years, offer his only son,  
To make more sure the promise to his seed,  
That it should last for ever even as God ;  
Feed thou the roots of promise in this house  
With a like precious dew, which then shall stand  
For ever and for ever in its place.  
'The sword shall never pass from out this house,

So runs the prophecy which first claims his,  
The founder's—or for what art thou outlawed?  
He knows his weakness—would not fly thee thus  
But that his grave draws him despite his will.  
How could he more provoke calamity?  
Look narrowly! Observe, God, latterly,  
Has lavished obvious signs! Do thou obey—  
And know it is not I who will despair,  
Since, as for Abraham, a miracle  
May show thee then some innocent escape,  
Like to a kid caught in a bramble bush.—  
Hark! hark! is that Uriah hoarse for blood?  
Thine if not his. God hears these sullen walls,  
That, like some sea-shell, harbour curses old  
And iterate them still, when silence serves—  
Let me start now. I see where David is,  
Defenceless 'mid old men and such as doubt  
Whether his cause be theirs; women are there  
And children, cattle and slow sumpter mules,  
Thy white-faced brothers chattering for fear,  
And all encumbrances and nothing sure;  
Wearied with walking long, while night draws round,  
They wander vaguely, seeing all things dim.  
Terrible is our God, terrible to obey;  
But disobeyed, Sodom declares his wrath,  
Gomorrhah howls the tale, Babel repeats,  
The deluge and the sword that turns about  
This way and that for ever, flaming fierce!  
My lord, let me set forth.  
HUSHAI (Starting up.)

Cursèd be thou,  
Accursèd be thy sons, thy fields, thy cattle,  
Thy houses and all, whatsoever things are thine.  
Cursèd be they for ever, saith the Lord.  
How violent are the wicked, froward wills;  
Usurpers on a confidence divine!  
Man walks in fear when most he pleases God!

ABSALOM\$ (Who has been some time risen, greatly moved.)  
Ahitophel, thou art a fevered man;  
Thou hast grown stranger day by day; some fit  
Comes on thee, beads thy brow with sweat, or else  
An evil spirit plagues thee, sent by God:  
And Hushai looks himself, he is in health.  
I have been led by thee and prospered still,  
But doubt thy genius leaves thee, as Saul's did;  
There seem more signs to favour Hushai;  
It seems more hopeful to be innocent.

MANY VOICES

Indeed, an oracle!

ABSALOM

Wait this one night;

I have ordained a feast;—so let us taste,  
Brave captains all and trusted counsellors,  
A first-fruit of our enterprise. Draw forth,  
Marshal to carnage on a narrow field,  
Devour whole bullocks crying 'Joab's prime,'  
And smack your lips o'er well hashed Gibborim;  
Piled squares of honey-comb like conquered cities  
Shall bleed their gold to sweeten lordly ease,  
Baskets of peaches humbly blushing wait  
Like captive maidens our nonchalant palates.  
I'll join you at the table, but would first  
Make some assay, above, to charm an hour  
And prime my fortunes 'gainst the time to come  
With promise sure.—Ahitophel, I take  
Thy first advice and will go up;—give place.

SEVERAL VOICES\$ (Solemnly.)

God save the king and multiply his seed.

AHITOPHEL\$ (Letting ABSALOM pass catches his sleeve while  
making a reverence and whispers imploringly.)

My Lord!

ABSALOM\$ (Laughing.)

No more—I'm bound for Eden-bower.

LXXII

No serpents, good Ahitophel; peace, peace!  
To-morrow thou shalt defeat old Hushai, yea,  
On every point, I swear it by my crown.

§ (He passes out to the right: almost immediately after LEMUEL returns and leads out MERAB. REBECCA who has been sitting sobbing and closely veiled looks up after him and cries, but too late to be heard.)

Ah, wilt thou leave me then to die alone!

§ (Seeing AHITOPHEL, who has remained standing where he was, she continues, rising to come to him, in entreating tones.)

O sir, thou seem'st not very busy now,  
I pray thee, are there cures for poisoned wounds?  
Of thy great wisdom help me, while there's time!  
We are so rich we could afford a charm:  
It is a little one, a pin's prick, sir!

AHITOPHEL § (Dreamily descending the stairs.)

A pin's prick, an hair's turning of the scale,  
An old man's foolishness, a young man's hopes,  
A little too much blood in certain veins  
Inclines the brain to fever: all is lost.

REBECCA

Oh say not so, good sir, but look at it;  
First see, how very small it is, dear lord,

§ (She bares her shoulder, coming quite close for him to see, while the CONCUBINES titter and the noise dies away from the council hall.)

AHITOPHEL § (Looking at and laying his finger on the spot.)

Here is no sign of poison, child; no change  
Of tint, no sullen look; this is sound flesh:  
There is no evil near thee. Go to bed!

REBECCA

God bless thee, sir; I kiss thy garment's hem.  
'Tis like enough that naughty woman lied;  
For these are laughing now as though they knew.  
I thank thine excellent wisdom, my dear lord.

LXXIII

☛ (She goes back and sits in the same place, covering herself with her shawl as before.)

AHITOPHEL ☛ (Coming forward.)

'Mine excellent wisdom,' O thou dreadful God,  
In such a child thou hidest thy rebuke.

I, serving thee, did think to serve myself:

Shouldst thou reward a man? Thou metest grace  
At pleasure, lendest wisdom for so long.

Should wise men crave a pyramid of stones,

Since such might seem to plead with memory

Not only, but with thee? 'This man was wise,'

Such stones might seem to say; 'But no man is,'

Thy countless stars reply in their calm glee

Scorning those numbered stones. I had forgot,

That to God only do belong wisdom

And strength and length of days. ☛ (He pauses and bows his head.)

'Tis best that I go home,

Who am but a dead dog.

☛ (He goes up and out through the council chamber, while the CURTAIN is slowly lowered.)

### ACT III. SCENE II.

☛ An open glade in the wood of Ephraim. Time, Morning. In front grass, then broken ground, stones, and boulders hiding the mouth of a pit, beyond the vista of the glade, where as the day proceeds skirmishers cross and recross. Enter in front AHIMAAZ and JONATHAN meeting; both cry 'Brother, good day,' and embrace. ☛

JONATHAN

Let us keep well together through the day.

AHIMAAZ

'T will scarce be cool as in the well last night.

She was the better sort, whose baffling chat

Put blinkers on lord Absalom's keen spies.

They never dreamed that we could hear them curse,

Or thought to shift her cloth, disturb her grain,

LXXIV

Or trouble her to stop her busy mill.

JONATHAN

I would not live through that same hour again ;  
By Noah's ark, it was an aching time !

AHIMAAZ

My limbs are yet a little stiff.—Paid pains !  
I never saw the king so pleased with me.  
The nimbler I with hope, this day may tide  
Some greater chance for me to bear good news ;  
I'll sleep in wells, or nest in lofty trees,  
Or run like a mad dog without a turn,  
To bring such safely to great David's ear.

JONATHAN

And so will I and more too.

AHIMAAZ

How more too ?

JONATHAN

Am I not stronger, swifter, elder born ?  
Then by so much the more.

AHIMAAZ (Laughing gaily.)

So Esau was,  
Yet Jacob won the blessing of the Lord,  
A weaker, younger man.—Yonder their tents !  
They keep but an ill watch ; the prince, see, leaves  
The vast pavilion pitched beneath those oaks.  
Come, let's make haste ; his trumpet speaks to battle.  
To Joab I, and to Abishai  
Speed thou this tidings ; but fight we side by side !

(Exeunt severally.)

(Enter ABSALOM riding a mule, followed on foot by LEMUEL.)

ABSALOM

This absence of Ahitophel's is cross ;  
Old Hushai shows but foolish in the field ;  
We have been talking, but what is there done ?  
At random have we pitched upon this wood ;  
Thus to fight parcelled, scared by screened alarms,

Mistaking hostile trumpets for our own.  
Mere chances arm against us ; Droob, found dead—  
My grand Egyptian bay, whom I more loved  
Than men love children, fed him choicer—'tis a sign.  
I know Ahitophel would cry 'A sign !'  
Perchance he poisoned him, and meant a sign,  
Which may not then come true.—Lemuël !

LEMUEL

My lord !

ABSALOM

Glance back : is Hushai still there ?

LEMUEL

He is, my lord, and arms him very slow.

ABSALOM

He does not mean hot work, but arms for flight—

For fear a child should hit him with a stone

Before he reach Jerusalem alive.

He props me with advice and nothing more ;

Ahitophel had been all mettle now,—

What's come to him ? Confound this Hushai ! fool !

He is too old ; I wish he were with David ;

'T is David, David, David rammeth home

His every word.

§•(Enter a MESSENGER.)

Fellow, what news ?

MESSENGER

My lord,

To Giloh came Ahitophel last night,

There, put his house in order, hanged himself,

And died so.

ABSALOM

Baal ! This mule's a stubborn brute.

§•(Dismounting.)

Here, Lemuël, hold him—I will fight on foot.

Their trumpets answer ours, I must be quick.

§•(To the messenger.)

Art thou not gone yet, villain, greedy cur,

LXXVI

Thou beast, thou blinking spaniel, fawning dog !  
(Drives him off, striking him with the scabbard.)  
Lemuël, I know this wood ; this glade is its  
Most likely spot. I'll always rally hither.  
Amassa must be captain (Ahitophel's not coming)  
I'll go to him at once ; we must lay on.  
So stop thou here, or just within the covert.  
How hot it grows !

§ (He turns round.)

What, art thou not gone yet ?

One minute to one's self ! § (Stamps.)

§ (LEMUEL leads off the mule.)

ABSALOM § (After a moment.)

Am I alone !

§ (Then louder.)

Ahitophel, Ahitophel, come back.

LEMUEL

Didst thou call, my lord ?

ABSALOM

No, the wood

Seems often full of words, but mark them not ;

I have been here a thousand times alone,

And heard most strange confabulations held

As though the trees did talk.

§ (Speaking lower when he is again alone.)

Ahitophel,

I never loved thee much. Oh, not enough :

Thy mind was strung too tense to tune with mine.

I needed thee, I need thee ; broken faith

Preaches like Nathan to me : I am judged.

God did ask blood, my father's, brother's, mine ?

I know not which. O feeble, feeble Hushai !

A king ? and do kings quake so in themselves ?

Has God's alliance ere been strictly kept ?

Saul was lost, David has been threatened, I

Must needs be punished worst. The law is plain,

LXXVII



'Thou shalt not strike thy father, no, nor kill.'  
When I was young and, thwarted, beat the air,  
Crying 'Bad father mine, O wicked David,'  
Nathan would oft say this, or some such thing,  
Was in our nation's covenant with God.  
Yet I am young;  
A covenant?  
Ah, is there none with youth—with beauty none?  
Did God not promise largely, making me  
So fair, so amply dowered?  
And would he have fulfilled?  
How could he bless us all?  
O forty brothers!  
There are too many creatures breathe the air;  
Too many claims; too many precedents!  
The presence of the world o'erawes my soul.  
To think but how the nations do lie deep,  
Even unto the earth's remotest end.  
Who knows, how far beyond the utmost isle,  
What hearts are beating as my heart beats now?  
I have slept fast and dreamed; now do wake up,  
And there the trees stand right and left of me,  
The grass, the stones are under foot once more,  
And I am just a man, a prince in Israël,  
Borne up between the horns of great events.  
Destiny fronts me, sullen in approach;  
Ahead the battle threatens parricidal;  
Courage is gone; despair must take the bit  
Between close serried teeth for half a mile,  
When either I shall enter, once again,  
The lovely kingdom of my late lost dream—  
Or I shall wince the pang of death and cease.  
This blood that thunders to my listening soul  
At halt, like one beside a waterfall,  
Beside its own past rushing on to havoc—  
This blood will creep among the daisy roots

And wind about the stones, or feel its way  
Down through soft earth, where mice have made them homes;  
Nor shall I, then, desire it otherwise.

No! This it is to dream: and waking was  
When I was king: ten minutes more awake,  
Ten minutes more to reign, ten minutes more  
To ride the shocks of war a visible sign!—

Then, boy, give me my buckler! Lemuël!

☞ (Goes out shouting on the right.)

☞ (Blare of trumpets: shouts in confusion: skirmishers dash across the distant glade: presently fugitives, now singly, now by twos and threes, cross in front: and at last LEMUEL, wounded, leads on the mule.)

LEMUEL

They have not hurt the beast. I got away,  
But still I bleed too fast; it is not safe!  
A faintness takes me—we must bandage it.  
I can't undo this scarf, it clings and knots—  
Rebecca, help me to untie . . . it hurts too much!  
Oh! Oh!

☞ (Swoons, falling with the bridle twisted round his arm. Fugitives still dart from covert to covert, and skirmishers still occasionally close in the distance.)

☞ (Enter ABSALOM, running.)

ABSALOM

Oh, here the mule is!—What, Lemuël hurt?

☞ (He attempts to raise LEMUEL, who staring wildly and propping himself upon his hand, cries.)

LEMUEL

My lord, my lord, thou art a wicked man.  
A mailed cherub past by here, but now,  
And asked where thou wast hidden. Oh!

☞ (Dies.)

ABSALOM☞ (Looking up where he is kneeling on one knee.)

God of our fathers, Great Jehovah, what!

Have I been proud a little? Childishly

LXXIX

Strutted beneath thine awful deep blue noon?  
Has David's God no touch of David's kindness—  
Got no indulgence? Hast thou none?—not even  
For princely beauty going on before  
Thy sure-foot wisdom—young and hungry beauty  
Left free, but tempted so without respite,  
Till driven by desires disordinate  
It makes a heady rush, sound health unknown,  
Through famine reaches famine, through thirst thirst,  
Meets, goaded thus, inexorable wrath,  
And hopeless hunted runs?

§ (Rising he attempts to lead off the mule, but the bridle being  
twisted in LEMUEL'S grasp, fails.)  
My very mule is tethered fast to death.  
No time to lose, I cannot force these fingers,  
There, there.

§ (He cuts the bridle with his sword.)  
My limbs hang back from flight; are they still proud?  
Yet all is lost, indeed! Oh, no, not yet  
Not yet, not yet! Bridleless now, my fate  
Or fortune is this uncontrollable beast,  
Spur him I can, but stop or turn him never:  
Then forwards, forwards, safety! Ha!

§ (His foot slips as he mounts.)  
O help me; I have sinned . . .  
Once more, I pray: let me not be quite vain,  
But use me to some purpose, most High God;  
Let me not die to-day! help me escape  
And school me in some distant unknown land;  
Like Joseph keep me captive! Let me work  
And win my father's pardon, brothers' love!  
They come, I see fierce Joab. Let me work!  
Help me escape! O grant me yet one day!  
One chance! One, one, one draught of hope!

§ (Having led the mule to the side he mounts and rides off on the  
right. After a minute JOAB enters on the left.)

LXXX

## JOAB

That was the prince fled hence? Yes, this is Lemuël,  
The boy he made his armour-bearer,—dead.—  
He feigned to love me—to love his father feigned.  
Our loves are of an older fashion, forged  
With our first swords, drawn and sheathed together,  
Mutually trusted; but these young blades' temper  
Is ignorant of extremes, both cold and heat—  
Never glowed white—roared plunged in a winter well.  
'Deal gently for my sake with Absalom,  
With the young man, even with Absalom!' and yet  
Thou fearedst, David, I was half with him:  
Dost prove me thus? 'Deal gently for my sake?'  
Thy words are often double-edged. So old,  
So gentle, yet so sure of foot, a wonder  
Is this man's mind and past my finding out:  
Yet he was keen to arm and march with us,  
And smiled the old way, snuffing at the breeze—  
For blood! 'T was the old smile.

☛(Enter a SOLDIER.)

SOLDIER

My lord, my lord,

Prince Absalom is hanging in yon oak,  
Caught by his hair, his mule has fled away  
And left him, slung alive twixt earth and heaven.

JOAB

Thou sawest him? ☛(Aside.) May I not cry a sign?—  
Why didst thou not then smite him to the ground;  
I would have given thee a girdle of brass,  
Ten silver shekels too, with other gifts?

SOLDIER

Though I received a thousand shekels now,  
Into my hand, I would not do this thing;  
For all heard David charge thee in the gate,  
Both thou, Abishai, and Ittai:  
He said to each 'Deal gently for my sake

LXXXI

With the young man, even with Absalom. Beware,  
Lest any touch the young man, even my son.  
And otherwise I should have wrought a falsehood :  
There is no matter hid from the great king.  
Why, thou thyself hadst set thyself, I know,  
Against me then, nor talked at all of shekels.

JOAB

I may not tarry thus with thee, 'To Joab !'

☛ (Goes off shouting.)

Let all his friends draw in to Joab now !

SOLDIER

I fear thou wilt displease thy master, Joab ;  
And, though the young man doth deserve to die,  
I would not meddle with God's vengeance,  
Knowing the king's mind stood averse to it.

☛ (Exit.)

☛ (After a time JOAB'S armour-bearers bear in the body of ABSALOM  
and cast it into the pit, then, as a great crowd gradually assembles,  
they throw in stones, filling the pit and raising a sort of rude  
pyramid above, while now one and then another says.)

May all die thus,

Who raise their hands against the Lord's anointed.

☛ (Or.)

Let this be for a sign ! Shall not men say

'How terrible is God !' on seeing this

In times to come ?

☛ (Or again.)

Let this make peace in Israël.

☛ (Or yet again.)

So establish thou our kings, O Lord of Hosts,  
Even as these stones that no man shall cast down.

☛ (And some mocking.)

Ha, Absalom, a jewel for thy crown.

☛ (Or.)

A soft sleek concubine come to thy bed—

Will lie with thee for ever close as death.

LXXXII

§ (Again.)

How thou art like to Samson in thy death!  
Save that the Philistines scarce weep so much.

§ (Or.)

A child is born to thee, a heavy child.

§ (And yet again.)

As the fair stars for number, this thy seed  
Shall bear thy name long as stones tell old tales.

§ (JOAB, who enters with ABSALOM'S cloak and chain and scarf,  
stands looking on, when AHIMAAZ runs up and addresses him.)

Let me bear tidings to the king, my lord,  
How that the Lord upon his enemies  
Hath thoroughly avenged him. Let me run.

JOAB

Thou shalt not bear the tidings to the king  
This day, my son! for, lo, his son is dead.

§ (Turning to one of his armour-bearers.)

Cushi, go tell the king what thou hast seen.

§ (CUSHI bows and runs off.)

AHIMAAZ

But, howsoever, let me run, I pray thee,  
I yet can overtake this Cushi.

JOAB

Nay!

Nay, wherefore wilt thou run, my son; since thou  
Hast got no tidings; thou hast not been here!

AHIMAAZ

But, howsoever, let me run.

JOAB

Run.

§ (AHIMAAZ runs after CUSHI, and shortly JONATHAN enters  
breathing hard.)

Was that not

Ahimaaz that sped away so fast?

JOAB

Ay, with tidings unto David is he sped.

LXXXIII

JONATHAN§ (Leaving JOAB and coming forward.)

Oh, I am hardly used and short of breath,  
Or I might overtake him even yet!  
This is a victory, yet have I won naught,  
No spoil, no fame, no prize for bearing news.  
O God, would thou hadst kept thy gifts for others  
And giv'n me this, to win myself somewhat,  
Instead of strength and comely looks and speed;  
Then weaker, younger men might joy in these.  
What should I care, a minion of thy choice?  
§ (The CURTAIN drops.)

### ACT III. SCENE III.

§ Without the Gate at Mahanaim. Time: Noon. The gate is flanked by two towers, and over it is a chamber, with a wooden cage for archers hanging outside, a casement in which is open. Between the inner and outer gates is a seat set up on a carpet for DAVID, and giving on this tunnel are two small doors leading, by the towers, to the room above. §

DAVID§ (Who is discovered pacing to and fro in the full sunshine before the gate.)

'Tis in the wind! I'm sure 'tis in the wind!  
This summer air, for all its gentle seeming,  
Doth sting me, like the velvet leaves of nettles,  
Charged with distemper, and I long to be  
Immersed in carnage: even so old a man  
Thirsteth for blood. Ah! whose would most refresh?  
Would that this hand might slay Ahitophel,  
Who I perceive has been the cancr'ous cause:  
Dearly 't would pleasure me to watch him bleed.—  
Hush, infanticidal rage! All fury sent  
Forth to their edging on who warm in slaughter,  
Imperils thee, my son, mine Absalom,  
My stolen boy.—Ahitophel, thou thief,  
Perish in thine iniquity! Not gold,  
Not power, not fame incited thee, but love;

LXXXIV

Or rather love, unsafely yoked with these,  
 Was snatched with them and sullied in thy hands,  
 Too coarse to value such a prize. Vile thief,  
 Called often friend, now, fiend for evermore!—  
 I rage again : and so I say again,  
 'Tis in the wind, a seed of Adam's sin  
 Invisible dust that enters by the eye  
 Which lusteth, by the ear which envies—cools  
 The moist warm palm, which covets—plays with skirts,  
 And finds the body out in all its weakness.  
 Ah, would that they had let me go to war!  
 'T would lay this fever. But, thou, bloody man,  
 Dost totter on the border of thy grave  
 And lust for blood! O David, forfeit soul,  
 Doth danger tempt thee yet?—I serve thee, God;  
 Desert not me! Thine, thine shall be the praise.—  
 'Tis foolishness to walk thus in the sun,  
 And heats the brain.

§ (He goes and sits down.)

WATCHMAN § (From top of the left tower.)

There comes a man.

DAVID

There is

If he do come alone,  
 Some tidings in his mouth?

§ (He comes forward and looks up.)

WATCHMAN

My lord, he is alone.

DAVID

I should sit down.

§ (He sits again. A silence.)

WATCHMAN § (Leaning over and seeing the porter, who has come  
 out by the small door in the left tower.)

Behold, another man, that runs alone.

PORTER

My lord, another man, there runs alone.

LXXXV



DAVID (Coming out again.)

He also bringeth tidings.

WATCHMAN

The running of the foremost man doth seem

Much like to that of young Ahimaaz,

The son of Zadok.

DAVID

Good—a good man, he brings

Good tidings.

(AHIMAAZ from without :

All is well !)

(Entering and falling on his face before David)

The Lord, thy God,

Be blessed, for he hath delivered up

The men that lifted up their hands, my lord,

Against my lord.

DAVID

Is the young man, even Absalom, safe?

AHIMAAZ

O king,

When me, thy servant, thy servant Joab sent,

I saw a tumult, but knew not indeed

What it might mean; though all men marvelled; for

The wood devoured more people than the sword.

I stumbled, coming, over those stunned dead,

Run blind 'gainst rugged trunks or tripped in brakes,

And fallen with a strange fatality,

The signal sign that God fought on our side.

DAVID

Turn thou aside; stand here.

CUSHI (Running on.)

Tidings, my lord !

For thee the God of Israel hath avenged ;

This day have fallen all who rose against thee.

DAVID

Is the young man, even Absalom, safe?

LXXXVI

## CUSHI

O King,

The enemies of my lord the king, and all  
That rise against thee to thy hurt, be as  
That young man is!

§ (DAVID rises, rends his garments, and proceeds through the small door in the right tower; wherein, mounting past the slit windows of the spiral stair, he is heard to exclaim.)

O my son Absalom, my son, my son!

O Absalom, my son, my son! Would God,  
That I had died for thee, my son, my son!

O my son Absalom!

§ (At last, having gained the chamber above, he is seen kneeling up in the cage; and, while parties of soldiers arrive and enter the town with downcast looks, he is heard, weeping bitterly, at intervals to wail forth) §

How beautiful was Absalom, my son!

O fairer than his mother in her youth,  
Was Absalom and stately as a tree.

Who will bring youth back to an aged man?

Ah, like my youth returned was Absalom!

§ (JOAB entering from the left meets SOLOMON coming through the gate, under which they stop.)

SOLOMON

My brother's death is sore upon my father. Hark!

DAVID

Had any other man so fair a son,

What king of old, what far-off king? None! none!

SOLOMON

Alas, I fear, he will refuse all comfort.

Couldst thou not save my brother then, O Joab?

JOAB

Hark thee, my son, put on these costly spoils!—

This cloak, he from his mother, graced Maācah had

LXXXVII

The King before put it on her, what time  
They wed with pomp ; it bears a blush, deep-steeped  
In hey-day pleasures, prosperous loves and times,  
Which yet his withered cheek will flush to meet :  
For memory is virgin to the last,  
Both quick and bashful.

DAVID

There was no fault in all his body found ;  
His skin was flawless, all his limbs were sound.

JOAB§ (Continuing, having paused while the king cried.)

This chain was Tamar's ; Is it not such the king  
Hangs round his virgin daughters' necks, when first  
They broach their blushing teens?

SOLOMON

Yea even such :

This is one of those chains.

JOAB

This Tamar gave him,  
No doubt, grown hopeless of a husband.

DAVID

He did not look like others ; coming he  
Shed from sheer beauty, sheer felicity :

Yet he is dead. Oh, Absalom is dead ;  
His hair heaped dabbled on a bloody bed.

JOAB§ (Having finished arraying SOLOMON in ABSALOM'S  
ornaments.)

Now will I up, reproach—rebuke him, then,  
When these first tears dry hard round his hot eyes,  
Come thou between me and his growing wrath  
And dim his vision with less scalding brine,  
Till, soothed, he comes to see like other men.

DAVID§ (While JOAB slowly ascends.)

My son, my son is gone, has ceased to be,  
Who long ago learned speaking on my knee.

Oh, Absalom is dead, my son so fair,

LXXXVIII

He hath no friends, no converse, walks no where.  
§ (And still, though JOAB stands beside him.)  
Darkness has stooped o'er thee, fallen and lost;  
Yea, lost and fallen, lovely as thou wast.

O Lord, my God, with Absalom, my son,  
Since thou hast done, thou shouldst with me have done.  
JOAB § (Laying his hand on DAVID'S shoulder.)  
How hast thou shamed the faces of thy servants,  
Who held thee worth ten thousand of ourselves!  
This day thy servants, who have saved thy life,  
The lives of thy sons, the lives of thy daughters, yea  
The lives of thy wives, and of thy concubines,—  
Thou hast shamed them all, thy servants; this day thou hast  
shamed them;  
For thou lovest thine enemies better than thy friends.  
For this day, I perceive indeed, had all we died,  
If Absalom had lived, though all we died,  
It would have pleased thee well. Now, therefore, rise,  
Go forth, speak comfortably to thy friends!

DAVID

Come not too near me, Joab, I am sore:  
The wounded lion's more dread than one unhurt.

JOAB

Now, by the Lord, I swear, if thou wilt not  
There shall not tarry with thee one this night:  
A far worse evil will that be to thee  
Than all evils else that have befallen thee  
From thy youth upward even until now.

§ (DAVID rises, and they descend in silence, and SOLOMON  
meets his father as he issues from the tower.)

DAVID § (Embracing SOLOMON.)

O my son Absalom, O Absalom!  
Yea, Solomon, thou must be now to me  
Thyself and Absalom. . . .

Yet, yet his beauty! that makes rich a grave

LXXXIX

Yonder among the trees ; in a strange place  
Mine eyes have never seen, shall never see  
His beauty lies. My son, my son ! he had  
Such splendid hair. (Again embracing SOLOMON.)  
God keep thee, my dear son.

(The CURTAIN falls.)

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